

Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D.D.

<u>Year: 1978</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
January 1	"Names Given To The Early Christians" "Pilgrims and Strangers"	I Peter 2:11
January 8	"Names Given The Early Christians" "Good Soldier"	I Timothy 2:3-4
January 15	"Open Letters"	II Corinth. 3:2-3
January 22	Names Given To The Early Christians" "Salt"	Matthew 5:13
January 29	"Names Given To The Early Christians" "Witness"	Acts 22:15
February 5	"Names Given To The Early Christians" "Disciples"	
February 12	"Names Given The Early Christians" "Saints"	
February 19	"Names Given To The Early Christians" "Fools"	I Corinth. 4:10
February 26	"Names Given The Early Christians" "Friends"	John 15:15
March 5	"Names Given The Early Christians" "Believers"	John 20:20-31
March 12	"Names Given To The Early Christians" "Christians"	Acts 11:26
March 26	"The Third Day"	Matthew 26:58
April 2	"No Other Gods"	Exodus 20:1
April 9	"To Lose This Sense of Reverence"	Exodus 20:7
April 16	"Halo—For A Day"	Exodus 20:8
April 23	"As God's Agents"	Exodus 20:12

1978 Continued

<u>Year: 1979</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
April 30	"The Sacredness Of Life"	Exodus 20:13
May 7	"Somebody's Daughter/Sister"	Exodus 20:14
May 14	"The Greatest Thief"	Exodus 20:15
May 21	"A Lie Is A Lie"	Exodus 20:16
May 28	"To Be Content"	Exodus 20:17
June 4	"All About Matthew"	Matthew 9:9
June 11	"Good Advice"	Romans 12:3
June 18	"When God Says Stay"	Jeremiah 42:14
June 25	"As At The First"	Genesis 15:4
June 28	Funeral Service for Luther Wallace Youngdahl	
July 2	"Declaration Of Dependence"	Psalms 127:1
July 9	"Living Stones - - Linked Together"	I Peter 2:5
July 16	"Now About Jacob - -"	Genesis 32:24
July 23	"Now About Jacob" (II)	Genesis 32:24
July 30	"Now About Jacob - -" (III)	Genesis 32:24
August 6	"In The Meantime"	Exodus 13:17-18
August 13	"The Working of Miracles"	John 6:5-6
August 20	"Grace Sufficient"	II Corinth. 12:9
August 27	"Personal Declaration"	I John 1:1-3
September 3	"Carpenter Wanted"	Luke 2:49
October 8	"In The Time of Yellow Corn"	Job 29:4

1979 Continued

<u>Year: 1978</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
October 15	"... Where One's Mouth Is"	Psalms 137
October 22	"In Praise Of A Name Saint"	II Timothy 3:11
October 29	"Man-With-The-Book"	Luke 4:17
November 5	"Of Saints and Sinners"	Romans 3: 23 & Matthew 5:48
November 12	"Certain People: Prime Witness"	John 9
November 19	"Certain People: The Forgiveness One"	Luke 7
December 3	"Mary, Most Honored One"	Luke 1:38
December 10	"Certain People: Joseph, Who Did The Right Thing"	Matthew 1:24
December 17	"Certain People: Herod – Bethlehem Butcher"	Matthew 2:16
December 24	"The News Is Good"	Luke 2:10

January 1, 1978

"Names Given To The Early Christians"
"PILEGRIMS AND STRANGERS"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

The sermon series scheduled to begin today which deals with the general theme: "The Names Given To The Early Christians" is significant that this initial sermon should be preached on this day which is in the Calendar of the Church the Name of Jesus Day. For I suggest to you at the very beginning that you never underestimate the importance of a name. Names are important, and that's why again and again they are chosen very carefully.

That's particularly true of the name of Jesus. The name was given to Him by the angel of God, and the name was deliberately chosen because Jesus was to represent in His life the full meaning of that name:

"His name shall be called Jesus, for he
shall save his people from their sins."

Let me say it to you again, names are important, and they ought to be chosen very carefully. Shakespeare was only half-right when he said, "What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet . . ." -- he was only half-right I say, because a rose is always a thing of beauty, and always something more than fragrance. The Bard of Avon was only half-right because there is something to a name.

Names are important - - Karen - it means pure

- - Dorothy - it means gift of God

- - David - it means beloved of God

Even nicknames are important. If I found myself with a bunch of people and I

heard somebody say, "Where's Frackles?" -- I'd know exactly the person for whom they would be looking, I'd get a visual image at once.....

...or somebody said, "How are you today, Shaggy?" -- I'd look around the group -- there'd be no question in my mind of the one to whom he was referring.....

Names...nicknames...they are important, because ~~names are they either describe~~ character or indicate the kind of ~~statement we wish the person would be~~.

The early Christians were known by certain names, and I'm asking God to suggest to you in this series when we'll consider some of these names that perhaps in our day we can appreciate all over again the basic character of the Christian by learning to recognize the names given to them.

So the first is the names. Would you indicate us -- a sponge out of names. And in all likelihood you've sudden thought of Christmas in this manner. But the Apostle Peter did. The Apostle Peter was writing to a group of people in his day who lived under very difficult circumstances. Had you and I been there we might have said to ourselves, "The world is going to hell, there is no question about it!"

There was a desecrated one upon the throne, Nero by name. He made great sport of persecuting the Christians. He devised all kinds of diabolical methods. One of them -- he dressed them up in the skins of animals, and then he would forcibly throw them into the arena, release the lions, and laugh and laugh and laugh as the lions tore the Christians to shreds . . . that was the pattern who was in control of the world when the Apostle Peter was writing to a group of Christians.

...he would also do this -- to give an example of Christians who would not recognize him as divine, forsake the name of Jesus Christ -- he'd dip their bodies in oil, then he'd tie them to a post, and when darkness settled in, to illuminate his garden,

he ignited the bodies, and they became a flaming torch....

The Apostle Peter was writing to a group of Christians who lived in a world such as that. And as he addresses them -- I'll give you the set of names that he gave to them -- he suggests that they remember who they are -- by the kind of name now he deliberately chose for them. As he writes he says,

"I beseech you, then, as pilgrims and strangers . . ."

-- that's the name he gave them. And that's to simply indicate that's what you ought to think of yourselves. A wicked world it is -- drifting toward Hell at a rapid pace, no doubt about it. But remember this: as a Christian you're just passing through -- you're not meant for this world forever....you're not meant to be like it....you're not meant to adapt to it. You're on your way to something greater and more wonderful.

Now you and I need to remember that. As wonderful as the world is in which we live -- and it is wonderful, isn't it? -- can you think of a better world for which you'd want to exchange it? Having said that, I know full well that you and I have our moments when we say, "Stop the world -- I want to get off!".....and when the pressures build up against us we can readily understand why some people want to withdraw from the world -- and they do!

I do not mention this in a disparaging manner, God forbid! But there used to be a member of this parish whose sister chose to withdraw from the world. She became a Carmelite nun of the Roman Catholic Church. Now a Carmelite nun, as I understand it, is a person who is given to silence, who separates herself from the world and doesn't traffic with the world, and devotes the remainder of her life completely to prayer.

Now I know very well that to the day I die I'll be indebted to people who pray for me, and the world is a better place because there are such things as prayer priests. But some folks envy the Carmelite nun because she can separate herself from the world and withdraw and retreat, and not be a part of it.

I remember when I went out to India, my friend said to me, "Now when we get down the road here about a mile -- look at the thing on the right." When we came that mile's distance I looked at the thing on the right -- an enclosure, about four feet square, maybe five feet tall -- I've forgotten what it was built out of at this moment....but in the corner of my eye as we passed I saw a man inside that enclosure. He was a holy man, and he had elected to withdraw from the world, to let the rest of the world go by! -- and to give his life completely to holy thoughts, not to get dithered up and messed up with the world. He wanted no part of it. Yet he was dependent upon people in the world who came to him with food and liquid refreshment.

But this I ~~strongly~~ say to you -- some of us can appreciate it: "Get off the world -- we want to get off -- we don't want to be part of it." But even our Blessed Lord says, "You are in the world but you're not of it." And as long as we're part of the world, how then shall we think of ourselves? Says the Apostle Peter, "Well for heaven's sake, think of yourselves in this way: you're passing through -- you're on your way to something more wonderful. Strangers and pilgrims, aliens and exiles, we're not meant to be here forever."

In company with some of you I've done a limited amount of travel and I have found myself on occasion in a certain place, and I'd like to stay there. I can understand why John F. Kennedy is supposed to have said what he said. Not long before they brought him and berthed him overlooking the nation's capital....he had gone out to visit the Custis-Lee Mansion. It must have been a perfectly beautiful day and John F. Kennedy said, "One could stay here forever."

I've had my moments when I've been in certain places where I'd like to stay there forever, and even when I have been travelling, the next day came and our bags had to be packed, the itinerary had to be kept. Why did we keep going? Because we allowed ourselves to believe that farther down the road at the next stop it might be just as nice, if not a bit better! And this is one of the

grand and good things about the Christian life. We have this hope that what lies beyond is always something better. We're meant to be pilgrims, we're on our way.

I don't know how you value your coming together here on a Sunday morning, but I'll tell you the stamp that I put upon it. And with a great deal of conviction, no less, that when you and I come together here on a Sunday it's a matter of re-orientation, it's trying to get things into a proper focus, and to determine all over again the direction in which we're meant to travel, and to add to the quality of our traveling the eternal dimension. Unashamedly I tell you that every person ought to say to himself as a Christian, "I'm not meant for earth, I'm not meant to stay here. Heaven is my destination."

So I tell it to you correctly when I say that there are people who take a blank canvas and they become artists and paint it....and chances are if they want to do a landscape, they never begin with the lower part of the picture. They begin with the sky first. And as they determine the nature and the quality of the sky, then everything else that appears in the picture takes shape and substance. When you and I permit ourselves to believe that we're pilgrims on our way to Heaven and we set our values on that basis, it's amazing how different this world becomes.

And that's the trouble with a lot of people. They never set their sights upon this world. They allow themselves to be so imprisoned and so conditioned to the things of this world, as though they were to stay here forever. And that just isn't so.

I'm reluctant to tell you this, it's recorded as an unwritten saying of Jesus. I don't put too much stock in unwritten sayings, and especially an unwritten saying of Jesus, but there's a kernel of truth in it that commands respect. This unwritten saying of Jesus puts it this way: "The world is as a bridge -- we're meant to pass over it and not to build a house upon it."

ground and good things about the Christian life. We have this hope that what
our life is like that. We're on our way toward something else.
Life beyond is always better. We're going to be pilgrims, we're on
unhappily I tell you, old-fashioned as it may be, I have schooled myself
and allowed my thought to accept in the fact that we're meant for Heaven. That
ought to be in our thinking. As wonderful as this world may be, we're only
here for a while, passing through on our way to some place else. And that
other place is called Heaven, where God really reigns completely and per-
fectly. And the value of that experience later on is going to be determined
by the way we live out the days of our years here and now. And that's why you
can't ignore the here and now...but its value is enhanced only as it's based
upon what's yet to come.

One of the sad things about our generation is that too many of us are
just settling in, settling down. Kirkcaldy tells about a barnyard fowl who
one day decided to just stay in the barnyard and make that the sum total of its
existence. It so conditioned itself to the barnyard, and became so fat, indolent
that one day when it did have a noble impulse to soar away, it was impossible
for it to get to wing. It had just settled down.

Said the Apostle Peter, come wind or weather, think of yourself as pilgrims
and strangers. This world for the Christian is always a strange world in which
to be. But as pilgrims we're on our way. And that affords us an end of delight
when I tell you that I look forward to seeing you as often as I do, because I
look upon you as fellow pilgrims along the way. We're traveling together, we've
not lost our sense of direction. And that's why we respect some of you as high-
ly as we do.

And now in closing, I can't walk away from this sacred desk without reading
to you of the wonderful story that Tolstoy wrote. It's a powerful story about
a young Russian Czar who fell heir to the throne of his father. It didn't
seem to very much. As they stood by his father's grave, a stranger appears
to the young Czar, and through his words, the Czar is brought to a new way of life. And

the stranger says to the young Russian farmer: "You want more land? -- I can tell it by looking at you! I'll tell you what I will do.....I will give you as much land as you can cover in the course of a day. It will be yours! You can begin where you are now standing, at the edge of your father's grave, and then by sun-down, this is the spot to which you must return."

....fired on by ambition, thinking of the things now that he could possess on this earth, he tears away, throws off his cloak, doesn't so much as embrace his wife and his children -- gives them no heed whatsoever....he tears away like mad.....and as he runs he says to himself, "I'll settle for six square miles -- I can do it!" Then he blocks off a square, and by noon-time it occurred to him that it could be possible to walk sixty miles, a fifteen-mile square. A stranger by the way offers him a drink by the way-side well....he brushes it by. Someone offers him a morsel of food....he will not eat it. Someone beckons him to just stop, and sit, and relax, and talk and think.....but he's driven by passion to claim as much as he can of this world.....

....in the distance he can see the sun nearing the horizon -- he's fired on like a crazed man -- he must reach the point where he'll receive what's been promised....
....with the last ounce of energy, and as the sun completely sets, he reaches the point where the stranger stands at his father's grave, only to collapse, fatally. There lies a dead man.

The stranger says, "I kept my promise -- I promised him as much ground as he could cover." And there you have it -- all that a man really needs: six feet long -- two feet wide.....

I offer you no further comment.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE THIRD DAY"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Matthew 26:55

In the superb interpretation by Masterpiece Theater of Leo Tolstoy's remarkable story of Anna Karenina, Anna is standing and watching her lover participate in the races. Suddenly along with others she is to her feet. She becomes apparently somewhat hysterical -- her lover has been felled by the horse. There is some uncertainty as to his condition -- how seriously is he injured? -- could he possibly have been killed?

Much to the embarrassment of her own husband, she doesn't conceal her concern for this man who is her lover. If the end is going to come, she wants to be by his side.

Anna is reacting instinctively. For down deep inside every single one of us there is this desire to be with those whom we love when the end draws near. I am reasonably certain that if I had the burden on my heart to come and tell you that I had just learned that someone whom you love has been grievously ill, has been stricken, and maybe it's a matter of minutes -- I am absolutely certain that even at some risk to your personal safety, you would go as fast as you could to be there when the end came.

Peter was that way with Jesus Christ. Let me read the text for you, it's the 58th verse of the 26th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

"But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in and sat with the servants to see the end."

Somewhere along the line he had met Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ had made a claim upon his soul and made him a different man. His life was never again the same once he acknowledged Jesus Christ as Master. Jesus instilled

in him high hopes, and Peter followed, believing now that the Kingdom would be established. But you know, of course you know, what happened in Jerusalem -- how all hell was let loose. And now it looks as though this is going to be the end for his Master.

Let me read this for you without further delay, it's been put masterfully:

"Only those who have nursed great expectations
can know great disappointment;
Only those who have tried hard to win
can know the pangs of defeat;
Only those who have dared to hope
can know the meaning of despair "

...and that was Simon Peter. He had hoped. He believed that his Master could win. He had great expectations. And now his world came tumbling in on him, and with so great devotion he sat there to see the end come. And undoubtedly he must have felt in his heart, if only he could stop the clock -- or what is more, go back to another day.

In West Side Story, it's Maria, you may remember, who screams and sobs when those two terrible gangs opposing each other have it out. The knifing takes place. One whom she loves is lying there in a pool of blood....Maria faces the grim reality of life and cries and sobs, "I wish it were yesterday!"

Peter remembered yesterday. And with today on his hands he wishes it were yesterday. And now he thinks the end is there. But Peter was wrong, for with God the end never comes. God is a specialist in tomorrow, God has such a thing up His sleeve, if you don't mind -- what we call "the third day."

Let me read it for you as someone has observed:

"There was an end to what men could do to Jesus,

a limit to what they could do to the love of God;
and on Calvary they reached that limit. Humanly
speaking, it was complete victory for the powers
which crucified Christ - - - humanly speaking.
But Easter -- we're talking now about Easter, not
Calvary, not Good Friday -- but Easter is not the
work of man, but it's the Word of God. And it
reveals that there's no end to the power of God to
win victory out of defeat "

This is not just a message for Easter Sunday, now hear me and hear me well.
Easter has no meaning if it can't be applied to every day, and especially for
those days when Truth and Beauty and Love and Friendship and Purity and Good-
ness are crucified before our very eyes.....and we can only stand and wring
our hands in sad lament, wishing it were a better day, like yesterday.

How long can it go on, the triumph of force...how far can injustice
go? a long way - - today - - tomorrow. But on the third day it breaks it-
self upon the fact of God. And all history bears witness.....

- Rome fell beneath the attacks of the barbarian
hordes....and pious men cried, "It is the end"
- the Turks swept across Europe to the gates of Paris,
...and again men cried, "It is the end!"...but it wasn't.
- the Red floods of Communism have engulfed a great
portion of the world, and seem ever to be drawing
nearer and nearer, and many voices cry, "It is the end!"

...but it isn't. From the Christian perspective -- hear me, and hear
me well - - - sooner or later Tyranny, Cruelty, Injustice, Violence -- they
break upon the very fact of God. And the truth that men are buried rise from
the dead to confront them with inescapable demands. For with God there is

always something yet to come - - and that which is yet to come is always better.
And Easter spells it out dramatically.

Before the day that Columbus came to America the Spaniards had on their coins an inscription and an impression of the pillars of Gibraltar...and the inscription was this: NE PLUS ULTRA - - "There is nothing beyond"
....but then there was a man named Columbus who braved his way to a new world.
And after that they changed their inscription on their coins simply to say:
PLUS ULTRA - - - "There is something beyond."

....that is the message of Easter. And Peter eventually found himself at the place where he had to believe it. He had to make the decision: Was he going to be a "Before Easter" man or an "After Easter" man?

Then there is that poem by James Russell Lowell entitled: "Columbus" -- the poet in those lines feels his way into what must have been the spirit of Columbus - - how he had to face the obstacles, first on land and then on sea... ..what the explorer had to endure, towards the end of that poem the crew puts the pressure on Columbus to go back -- all those days at sea, and no sign of land -- food supply, water supply diminishing.....they besiege him almost to the point of mutiny -- turn back and to head for home -- to go back to the East. But Columbus begs for one more day. He cries out, "God, let me not in their dull ooze be stranded" . . . and God who loves us will never allow us to be stranded and to be mired by the hell that men let loose in this world. For with God there is always the promise of tomorrow. And with God promising tomorrow -- He promises for only one reason: to give us some better thing.

And that's the decision that Peter had to make. Did he sit there and see what he thought was the end? Or would he, when the Christ returned, believe that a purpose was being fulfilled? Peter -- you thought it was the

end. But life is never to be read through the lens solely of the human perspective. It's always to be seen from God's point of view. And that's the meaning of Easter. This I most certainly believe.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"NO OTHER GODS"

(First in a Series of Sermons Based on The
Ten Commandments)

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Exodus 20:1

Presumably as delightful and surely as successful as any musical that began in the National Theatre, then moved on to Broadway and international acclaim is Fidler On The Roof. Many recollections will come quickly to your mind. As charming as any, of course, is when Tevya asks his wife whether she loves him or not. And then she replies in such superb fashion by detailing the things that she's done day by day, throughout tedious monotony, perhaps, of twenty-five years. And then it occurs to him - - she loves him!

I suggest to you that again and again you and I must appreciate, with a pristine quality, the basic teachings of the Christian faith. They are always there, but you and I must discover them anew for ourselves. And only as we discover them, by whatever route it may be, will we begin to appreciate who God is, what He's like, and how He deals with us - - - to that extent we may find as we have never found again, or before, the purpose for our living. It's in that spirit that I come to this sacred desk today, to introduce a series of sermons that will deal with the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments have always been there, but let me say it to you as strongly as I can - - every generation has to interpret and re-interpret the Commandments for themselves. They are not simply to be accepted as something that's been handed down. As worthy as that may be of our generation, somewhere, somehow in our own experience we are in duty bound to recognize their validity.

Now let me read it for you as it appears in the page of the Good Book.
The word ought to be readily recognized:

"And God spoke all these words, saying,

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

'You shall have no other gods before me.

'You shall not make yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

'You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

'Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maid-servant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

'Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

'You shall not kill.

'You shall not commit adultery.

'You shall not steal.

'You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

'You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's."

Now when all the people perceived the thunderings and the lightnings and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled; and they stood afar off, and said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die.' And Moses said to the people, 'Do not fear; for God has come to prove you, and that the fear of him may be before your eyes, that you may not sin.'"

What your reaction may be to this series of sermons I'm not quite certain. And I can't find myself saying to you I don't much care what your reaction may be. Frankly, I do care. And I place such a high value upon this series that I wouldn't take ten weeks, a sizeable chunk out of the year, to invite your attention again and again to the general theme of the Ten Commandments, as we consider each Commandment in turn.

I'm fully aware of the fact, of course I am, and you know that I am --

aware of the fact that ours is a generation that doesn't much care for discipline. We have a generation on our hands that's always saying, "Give me freedom - - let me do my own thing - - I want to be me!".....a generation on our hands that cries out against restraint, that has no appreciation whatsoever for discipline. I am fully aware of the fact that Sunday after Sunday when we deal with these Ten Commandments we'll be talking about a "Thou shalt not - - " or a "Thou shalt - - " in which the authoritative tone of God echoes down through the corridors of time, telling us what He expects us to do and what He believes a true follower of His would not do.

There is an ancient fable of a spider who descended one day by the slender thread he had spun out of his body from the dark rafter in the barn which was his home. On the lower level he built his web, and before long grew sleek and prosperous. Like many human beings, he became forgetful. One day as he moved efficiently about his web, he was irritated to discover that slender filament which rose vertically from his web and disappeared into the darkness beyond. As he looked at it and mused, he said to himself, "Why, that thread catches no flies! Of what earthly use can it be?" . . . and so speaking, he extended the crooked claw and severed the thread whereupon, as you well know, the whole web collapsed.

Paul Althouse, a voice of God raised by God to speak to the people of his native Germany as they lifted themselves out of the rubble, proclaimed the good news of God in a series of sermons based upon the Ten Commandments. As he began that series of sermons he gave them to understand in no uncertain way that the rubble was there, and their hopes that they had placed in one man had been destroyed -- the Reich that was to go on for a thousand years just wasn't there. And he said it happened because "We lost our link with the eternal - - we severed that thread that unites us with God."

I do not claim to have any prophet's blood coursing through my veins, but as I come to you today and as I shall come to you Sunday after Sunday by the grace of God, I may strike that note with you, that it could be that unless today and in our time, unless we establish anew an appreciation for our link with God, our world too could collapse. This I most certainly believe.

What is religion -- you remember it from your Latin, don't you? -- religio, religionis -- it means to be held to or to hold on to something, to be bound by something. And God has His hold on us. God binds us to Him by His laws. God binds us to Him by His rules and by His regulations -- they are Ten Commandments, mark you -- not ten suggestions -- not ten options. But because He loves us He calls them commandments.....not for His sake but for our good. He is our Heavenly Father who knows how we must be dealt with.

Did you know that Aristotle had such a thing which he called "The Doctrine of Habituation"? Now bear with me as I try to describe it for you -- the Doctrine of Habituation. He argued, as I understand, that there is a time when it is not possible to give a child freedom. It is not that the child is bad. It is that at the stage of childhood the child has not the wisdom of experience, the ability to take the long view and to calculate the consequences which freedom demands! We have, therefore, at this stage, to submit the child to discipline, to control him, so that the child develops the habit of doing the right thing.

Listen to this simple observation: you only learn to play the flute by practising playing the flute according to the laws of flute-playing. You only learn to be good by practising goodness under the discipline, and sometimes even the punishment of the laws of goodness. There is a stage at which the child has to be habituated, and even compelled, into goodness -- only after he has reached the stage of habituation is it possible to trust him with freedom.

God is our Heavenly Father. God's been trying to get that through to us from the very beginning. And if I were to apply the imagery of the Pennsylvania Dutch to the mind of God, I could hear him say to us, "Why are you so long so dumb, so short so smart?" - - - "I have been telling you these things all along the line, even from the very beginning..... "

...think of the Garden of Eden -- how idyllic the imagery is that comes immediately to your mind -- the Garden of Eden -- and even in the Garden of Eden -- God the Creator of the world says to man, as a Heavenly Father: "This is a no-no -- enjoy! make the most of it, but this is something you shall not do.

...and having endowed us with the freedom of choice, God Himself has His moments when He stands back and sees what damned fools we can make of ourselves.

God, if we may apply the figure of speech to Him, stands there and wrings His hands and bows His head and cries out sorely - - - "When - - when will they ever learn?" To keep us from tripping ourselves up, and out of love, authoritatively speaking, He says, "These are the rules."

I am a regular reader of a Roman Catholic publication called "Our Sunday Visitor." A man, I think by the name of Jim Langdon, has a column which I read avidly. Some time ago he was reminiscing as to what his life was like before he became a column writer. He had an interesting position with a certain company that manufactured games, and his responsibility was to write the rules for the games. Somebody would design the game, somebody would contrive it in his mind, and then they would manufacture it. But before it went on the market they had to determine how the game can be best played.

.....and he'd experiment. And he'd set down certain rules. And then he'd invite some of his friends into his office or his studio and he'd tell them about the game, and he'd watch them play it.....and as he observed them and saw the mistakes they made, he'd benefit by that and write them into the ~~r~~ules eventually,

as the game went on the shelf in the store.

And then sometimes he'd invite some of his friends into his home and he'd tell them about the game, and then he'd say, "Here, I'd like you to play it. Let's see how it goes. Tell me what you think of it." And there would be always those who would say, "Well, where are the rules?" - - - and he'd discover that when they played by the rules they were happy and thoroughly enjoyed the game. But on occasion he'd have some folks who'd completely disregard the rules -- he'd say, "Here they are." But they'd say, "No, we're going to try it without the rules....we're going to play it our way." And inevitably he'd discover that when people did it that way, they became bored, they didn't enjoy it, and sometimes became very, very angry.

I'm reluctant to say it to you, but give me the liberty for the moment: God is like a maker-of-games . . .

...now let me say quickly, God is the giver of life, He knows how it's to be played....He knows the way to achieve success. He knows how we can make the most of the experience. When we don't

I used to hear people say something about breaking the Ten Commandments. I'm not sure that's the way to put it. You don't break the Ten Commandments. This is what happens: when you don't obey them, they break you! Life itself proves it.

Now the first Commandment:

"I am the Lord thy God. You shall have no other gods before me."

Man is always the god-maker, you know that. We're always enthroning something, or someone. There is always something that we worship. I'm not going to take your time nor spend my energy in talking to you about the gods we worship. God knows we'll do it. God knows we'll always place a high value on something or someone. And so at the very beginning, to spare us a lot of mistakes, He says, "I am the Lord your God. Keep me first."

You know how this whole business of believing in God began, surely you do. Historically there was poly-theism. Man who believes in God believed in many gods. He had a god for almost anything, you name it. Then he advances to a certain stage in his religious experience where he had a national god, a god that belonged particularly to his own people, to his own tribe. And this was one god of many gods. His god was not the only god, but his god but his god existed alongside of other gods, some good, some bad.

And then you had this exceedingly precious moment in history when Moses codifies the law. And God talks in terms to His own children of only one God. And that's how monotheism became part of the picture. You can't divide your loyalties, even when you think in terms of God. And in language that we might understand even to the end of time, Jehovah says, "I am a jealous God! I won't allow you to afford to share me, because there is none like our God"-- the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I'm reminded, Southy once wrote a poem. He tells of the abbot in the monastery who put a bell on a dangerous rock to warn incoming vessels. A roving pirate once sacked the town and cast the bell into the sea. Years later, as the story goes, on a wild and stormy night, this same pirate tried to steer his way into the harbor, but he listened in vain for the bell on the rock which would have given him his bearings. And he and his ship went down to an ocean grave.

I say to you as earnestly as I can, we are ourselves responsible for many of our defeats simply because we have cast off our consciences. We blindly ignore their warnings until they shrivel and die. We have so accustomed ourselves to doubtful/^{moral}practices that we think we have outsmarted the laws of God. Then in our hours of strongest temptation we find ourselves adrift, with nothing to guide us to safety. A good educated Christian conscience is a good thing to keep alive against the time when it alone may stand between us and disaster.

So God gives us the Ten Commandments, the chief of which is:

"I am the Lord your God"

...and He keeps holding us by it: "Remember!" "Remember!" "Think first in terms of Me!" And when we have the grace and strength to do it we save ourselves from a lot of grief. This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TO LOSE THIS SENSE OF REVERENCE"
(Second in the Series of Sermons on the Ten Commandments)

GRACE, Mercy and peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

The name of Lorin Wade probably doesn't mean much, if anything, to you. But you ought to give her some heed, if only momentarily, during these prefatory remarks. Let me tell you how she first came to my attention.

She was one of fifteen - - fifteen people had been chosen by a distinguished British journalist from Fleet Street to present a series of articles dealing with the way they observed the contemporary scene: specifically, How do you think people think about God? - - and the authority that belongs to God? And also, how do you assess the contemporary scene, from the stand-point of morality?

The articles were submitted.

The man in charge gave top marks to Lorin Wade - - a surprising thing because she had just turned twenty years of age at the time she wrote her article. Why was she so recognized? From his standard, she more than any others presented the strongest protest against the loosening of moral standards.....twenty years of age when she wrote her article.....and she also presented the strongest plea for the recognition of the necessity of rules and regulations and law.

You may be a bit uncomfortable when I tell you that in the article that she wrote, as I understand it, she was quite deliberate as she rebuked the Church. She appealed to the Church to stand its ground, not to compromise, not to retreat. Some of us who try to put our finger on the spiritual pulsebeat of the Church today lament the fact that it seems as though the Church does try to compromise with the world, tries to meet the world half-way. If the world doesn't come up to the standards which we are meant to proclaim in the name of Jesus Christ and

according to Biblical truth - - then let's wink, or adjust ourselves downward to where the world happens to be.

I must confess to you that I don't believe that in the final analysis that the world really respects us when this happens. There was the cartoonist, you know, who cleverly pictures the boys in the barracks making some reference to the padre who had been with them -- the kind of person who feels that he has to be as one of the boys, who leans over backward not to let his clerical collar show, who lowers his standards. As the chaplain leaves, according to the cartoonist, one soldier says to the other, "If it's anything that I can't stand, it's this unholier-than-thou attitude!"

Now back to Lorin Wade and her article. These are some of the things to which she addressed herself:

-- one, divorce is on the increase. Observation: the Church all too often says, Let marriages, then, be made more flexible, less demanding in what we expect from a marriage. And let's say nothing harsh of those who live together without the benefit of marriage.

-- she tackles the fact that immorality is common . . . and then she rebukes the Church for saying that pre-marital intercourse is not necessarily wrong . . .

-- she recognizes the fact that illegitimacy is on the increase -- and therefore she came down heavy on the part of those within the Church who without any qualification whatever favor abortion . . .

-- she recognizes the fact that murder is on the increase -- and therefore she rebukes the Church for not taking a stand in favor of more rigid sentencing....

...so Lorin Wade surveys the contemporary scene. Undoubtedly many of you will not fully agree with what she's observed. But I dare say if you listen to me now, as I share with you an analogy that has come fresh from her thinking as

she regards the necessity for rules and regulations and authority -- I quote directly:

"If everyone is fouling like mad in a game of soccer, the athletic association does not automatically change the rules so that those who are doing so can continue to play a dirty game within the law. Even if everyone except one player is fouling, they would still of necessity base their rule judging on how they think the game should be played and not how they think it is being played. You do not scrap the rules just because some people prefer to ignore them or to reject them."

That's why, God willing, I shall be coming back to this pulpit repeatedly during these weeks ahead to talk to you about God's rules -- God's regulations -- the authority that belongs to Him.

In conversation with one of our choir members between the last service and this he was kind enough to give me the benefit of some of his reading in which he shared with me the thought that a man who is well versed in the contemporary scene predicted the day when the Church will again declare in no uncertain terms the recognition of the authority of God.

A wit once observed that it took God one night to get Israel out of Egyptbut it took Him forty years to get Egypt out of Israel! Forty years -- that's a whole generation, at least in those days. And it may take us a whole generation to get us back to where we belong in this appreciation for the Ten Commandments. I said to you last Sunday in the initial sermon that every generation needs to discover anew and for itself the validity of the Ten Commandments, to begin at the point where God says: "This is it!"

Today it's the Second Commandment in the brief time that remains:

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain,
for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes his
name in vain."

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain."

What, I ask you now -- think carefully -- what, I ask you now, is your most cherished, ~~private~~ private and personal possession? Now think. What is your cherished, your most treasured private and personal possession?

I'm going to answer the question for you and answer it for you sublimely in the words of Dr. Edgar Carlson, who at one time was President of our Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. Presumably speaking in general terms on the Catechism, and touching on the Ten Commandments in particular, he said to the college students in chapel one day, "Your name is your most cherished, private and personal possession. Other people may have the same name, and other people may spell it the same way, but your name, when spoken and meant for you, is your most personal and private possession. To all intents and purposes, then, you are equated with your name. Your name is yours."

God has a name. He does not prefer to be nameless. He is always telling us who He is and what He's done and what He's been up to. He's always revealing Himself. He wants us to know exactly who He is. And that's why for our benefit He revealed Himself fully and completely in Jesus Christ. As St. Paul said it so well -- "In him" (meaning Jesus Christ) "-- all the fullness of God dwells." God wants us to know exactly who He is.

There was a time, as some of you may know, in the development of the Children of Israel, in the human race and their knowledge of God, according to the Hebrew tradition, when men did not pronounce the name of God. They respected it that much -- they felt themselves unworthy, as God gave them to understand it, to use His name. And then after a while God, out of love for us, lets us have His name, and you won't forget, He goes so far as to give us His name.

Now God says, "My name is to be kept holy."

Now you can spell that either way, both ways -- holy or wholly -- wholly His. It belongs to none other. And when you think of God's name, we're meant to think in terms of who God is. For remember now, you equate the name with the person: the person is the name -- the name is the person. It can't be otherwise. If somebody says something unkind about you, and they use your name, you can't hide behind the fact and say, "They weren't talking about me -- they were just talking about my name." Now God had brought the Children of Israel to a particular point. He knew exactly what was ahead for them, and He also know what would happen to them if they would forget Him -- who He is and what He is. So He said, "You keep paramount in your thinking who I am -- whenever you think of me and my name, you keep it holy. You don't abuse it, you don't misuse it, you don't drag it in the dust. For your sake!"

For He gave them to understand that whenever they were to think of Him they were to think of Him as He is -- the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who brought them out of Egypt, the God who freed them from Pharaoh's hand, the God who parted the Red Sea.....the God who led them into the Promised Land by day and by night, giving them some token.....the God who gave them manna from heaven....the God who gave them Moses and Joshua.....

.....not only the God who was the Father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but the God who was the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who also has a name, a name which is above every name -- a name which means He shall be our Saviour, to free us from our sins - - - all these things are to come to our mind when we think of God, lest we forget, we forget at great peril. So God says, "Be careful how you use my name because this will indicate how you think of me!"

Words are important. The little girl was absolutely right when she says, "How do I know what I think until I first say it?" Let me find myself in the

company of people where silence reigns, and then somebody begins to speak -- and as soon as somebody begins to speak, unless he's plagued by hypocrisy, I can tell immediately something of that person's character, where he is and where he's coming from. Words are that important. And God says, "Be careful then, when you use words, how you use my name, because as you use those words people will know what you think of me."

Let me give you as succinctly as I can the most relevant of all examples. What would you think of a person, if when he was inclined to swear, to curse, or to be profane -- would use the name of his mother? -- the woman who gave him life, the woman who cradled him in her arms. the woman who follows him to the very grave.....the woman who loves as no other person in this world can love him. What would you think of her? What would you think of the man who would use her name as he curses, as he swears, as he speaks profanely?

God has feelings, too. And our character is revealed by the way we speak the name of God. I can't tell you now who it was, whether it was the President of Yale or Harvard, who at one time said the mark of a truly educated man is the mark that lies in his willingness to speak the name of God without reluctance, and with respect.

My last word concerning this Commandment to you is this, as Luther interprets it for us: "We should so fear and love God as not to curse, swear, conjure, lie, or deceive, but call on him in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving."

....it isn't very decent of a chap who eventually will be driven to his knees and will have to call upon the name of God, who up to that time has dragged the very name into the dust.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"HALO- FOR A DAY"

(Third in a Series based on the Ten Commandments)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from
God our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

Excerpt 20's

As a tourist in England some years back, I remember seeing the very clever cartoon designed for the London, Midland and Scotland Railroad, for presumably the people in charge of that railroad were fully aware of the fact that there were only two kinds of travelers -- those who remember to take their luggage with them, and those who can forget. To counter that sort of thing, especially those who are inclined to forget and then cause a burden for the officials of the railroad company, as part of their propaganda they had this very clever poster. It was the caricature of an elephant, presumably who never forgets -- but there was a note tied onto his tail.....and underneath this inscription:

"HAVE YOU LEFT ANYTHING BEHIND?"

People who travel through life are in duty bound to ask themselves the question every now and then: Do I have everything with me that rightfully belongs to me? Do I have everything with me now that I ought to continue to take as I continue my journey? Is there anything that I've left behind?

The proverbial elephant who never forgets anything may still in this rapid age of ours need to have a note tied onto his tail. For those of us who travel through life in this mad and terrific pace which becomes our generation of necessity must be reminded again and again: have we left anything behind? Is there something in the past that we ought not to leave there? Is there something that we've received along the line that's meant to be continued with us and we are still to be recognizing it as something useful, without which we ought not to be able to continue our journey.

It's in this manner and this mood that I come again to this sacred desk as we continue a series of sermons based upon the Ten Commandments. For most certainly the Ten Commandments come to us out of the past. But as I read the mind of God, with whatever sensitivity He gives me, the Ten Commandments were not intended to be left behind us. God has not changed His mind, they are still meant to be useful. We ought not to continue our journey through life without them.

When I go to Manhattan there are many things that I enjoy seeing. There are two places, however, that if at all possible I want always to include in the stay, no matter how brief it may be. Both of them are churches: one of them, on 5th Avenue, in my judgment the most magnificent of all Gothic churches in this part of -the world, St. Thomas.....the other is St. Bartholomew Church on Park Avenue. The rector there wrote a book a few years back. A friend gave it to me. I was thumbing through its pages not so long ago, and in that book he reflects about an experience that he had had with a couple who had invited him into their home.

They had been married for some time, but now they had moved into this, their new home -- contemporary from the word go. And as he went from room to room he soon discovered that the decor and the furnishings were all contemporary. He found no fault with that. And then as they finished in the kitchen, where they had a cup of coffee, he looked out through the window and saw beyond the breezeway the garage, with two cars parked in the driveway. And he jokingly said, "You build a garage and you keep your cars on the outside -- it doesn't make sense." And the woman said, "Oh, but we use the garage. This house doesn't have an attic, and so the garage serves as an attic for us. The garage is the modern-day adaptation of the old attic."

And they said to him, "Perhaps you'd like to finish your tour by going to

the garage with us." And as they went they showed him a number of old pieces, and his eye fell on one in particular -- he knew what it was, it came out of his generation and the generation before him. It was a chiffonier. (now that's a chest of drawers, isn't it?) And he said, "Tell me about this piece -- even its name sounds strange in this, our day. But tell me about it."

And the young woman or the woman of the house said, "It's an heirloom. It belonged to my grandparents, and I remember how when I visited in their home they used it. And I recall so very well the very place where it was located. Then my grandparents wanted my parents to have it, and as I was growing up in my home we used it too, we had a place for it. And then dad and mother broke up housekeeping, they wanted us to have it. So we brought it along with us, and we've used it. But now that we've moved into this contemporary house, and with our contemporary furniture, it seems to be out of place, it just doesn't fit. But out of respect for my parents and my grandparents, we can't quite give it up. So we've stored it in the garage, we've put it aside, and that's where it is now."

I suggest to you that there's a parable here. Could it be that that's the way it is with the Ten Commandments? -- something valued in the past, something that our grandparents and parents themselves respected, something used and cherished by them -- somehow for us moderns we can get along without it. We just don't need this set of rules. It doesn't quite fit our modern way of thinking and our modern way of living. Yet, nonetheless, we can't quite give the Ten Commandments up, so we'll store them somewhere -- respectfully we'll tuck them away.

Could it be that that's the purpose that the Church serves -- we tuck the Ten Commandments away in the Church, and are quite content to allow the Church to become the custodian of the Ten Commandments, the custodian of something

that comes out of the past, an heirloom - - something valued in a day that has come and gone. But we, we're not about to make full use of it. We can get along without it. We'll store them somewhere else.

If this is a generalization that can be made about the whole series of the Ten Commandments, it's most particularly true about the Commandment that we're about to study now:

"Remember the Sabbath day, to
keep it holy."

....we won't have done with it completely, but yet we won't place the same value upon it that our forefathers did.

Some years back when I visited Charlotte, North Carolina, our host was driving us around the business area. And then when we came to a certain store he stopped and he said, "Now I want you to pay attention to this store - - " He said, "There's something unusual about it." Well the appearance on that day wasn't at all unusual.

He said, "Let me tell you about it. That store was owned and operated by a man who was a God-fearing individual, he was of the old school, and he had a great regard for the Ten Commandments, and particularly for the one that deals with the Lord's Day. It was his rule that when Sunday came, the shades would be drawn, the curtains would be drawn, and if you passed his store on Sunday, you couldn't even have the benefit of browsing and looking at the merchandise. So rigidly did he adhere to this Commandment!"

I was just told since this sermon was preached at 8:30 by a person who heard it that such a practice was followed a number of years ago by Woodward and Lothrop here in the Nation's Capital. But it's gone by the board now, you know it has. And now we have the open Sunday on our hand, where many

places of business are open and we're encouraged to shop....and there are even advertisements that read: "These bargains are SUNDAY ONLY bargains."

...we've come a long way from the drawing of the curtains and the pulling of the shades....

Now what's to be said about this Commandment? The key word of course is remember. That's what God's always saying to us: Don't you dare forget! Because there are some things we need to remember. It is only as we know the stock from which we stem that we're really able to fulfill our role in life. God is saying to us: "Remember who I am" - - - and that's why the first three Commandments deal basically with God Himself - - - for all that follows has little meaning unless we first recognize God, the fact of God, the nature of God, His name, and His day remember.

The word Sabbath really means "to come to a halt -- to break off -- to stop." And that's how the old Jew understood it. He began by remembering that God created the heavens and the earth in six days...and then on the seventh day He came to a stop -- He broke off. And is it too much to suggest that in having done that, He took time to reflect upon what had been done, and the purpose for which it had been done. That's exactly why we have one day in seven that's set aside with a 'halo-of-sorts' in order to bring things in true and proper perspective, in order to concentrate anew upon the fact of God, as to who we are and whose we are and what we are meant to be.

One thing needs to be clearly established at the outset. I don't get up-tight at all about this business of its being the first day or the seventh, really I don't. And when my Seventh Day Adventist friends try to get me into an argument on this point, I have little enthusiasm to pursue it. Really now, to settle at this level can cloud the basic issue of the 'first' or the 'seventh' day, for all seven days of the week are important to God. And because this is true, and because He wants us to understand that He holds ~~us~~ us accountable for

what we do in and with all seven, He has placed a 'halo-of-sorts- on one day in particular. It is on this day that we are meant to get all the others in proper perspective.

Now this shouldn't be difficult for you. Why do we celebrate anniversaries, why do we celebrate birthdays? Isn't it true that on a birthday, properly observed, you and I recognize that someone gave us life. If we're not inclined to think about it at other times, then properly in observing our birthday we recognize that somebody gave us life, and that someone in our infancy stood over us and cradled us and guided us and nurtured us. We need to remember these things. That's exactly why it seems to me that God gave this Commandment: Remember -- on this day in particular, what I have done for you -- I created the world -- I gave you life.

The envy of some of you grandparents, presumably, Winifred and I deeply appreciate the fact that we can see our grandsons as often as we can. And I reflect in your presence now and muse how, when both of them were brought home from the hospital after they had been born, and they stayed a great period in our home, I can still see each of them, little more than a week old, not being able to do practically anything for himself.....even a pair of hands had to turn him over. When our birthdays come around, we do well to properly recognize what's been done for us in the past -- who gave us life and who sustained us through these days and years of our life. The old Jew broke off one day in the week to remember what God had done for him.

It was on that one day in the week when he remembered how God had delivered him out of Egypt....it was on that one day of the week when he remembered how God led him through the wilderness.....it was on that one day in the week when he remembered how God gave him manna from heaven.....it was on that one day in the week when he remembered how God gave him Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It was on that one day in the week when he reminded himself of the

covenant which God had made and said, "I will be to you and you will be to me in a way that I will not be to any other people." And the Jew is what he is today because he is remembering he survives as a nation because he remembers who he is and and what God has done for him.

And by the same token the Christian -- for a while he observed the seventh day of the week, and then it occurred to him that it was on the first day of the week that God had done something for him, He left the grave empty. And from that time on, as Christians began to realize this and to remember it, they said, "We will make the first day of the week as an Easter, and all of our worship experience, it will be on the first day of the week that we will look back and we will remember what Jesus Christ has done for us..."

-- they remembered it was on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to them, and banded them together into the Family of God...and that gave them the Holy Christian Church....
....they said, "We will look back and we will remember - - " that's how the first day of the week came to mean so much to us, because on that day they looked back and they remembered.

If you want rules and regulations, if you want rigidity, my friend, when I think of keeping this Commandment, it isn't so much what you shouldn't do as much as it is what you ought to do. And that's why God gives the Commandment: Remember - - - remember me, and what I have done for you -- break off! Stop! Bring to a halt.....take time to think fully of me." This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"AS GOD'S AGENTS"
(Series on the Ten Commandments - IV)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Gifted 20:12

It was an article that appeared in the American Scholar and was written
some time ago by Louis Kronberger. This is what he had to say:

"Ours is not so much an age of vulgarity as of
vulgarization. Everything is tampered with,
touched up, adulterated, or watered down in an
effort to make it pay. What we need for cultural
health today is what we needed and got for our
physical health when we established the Pure
Food and Drug Laws."

What we need now, thought Louis Kronberger, is a kind of "Pure Thought and
Feeling Law."

I don't know how many people may have responded to the article, but I
would hope that somewhere there was a preacher who wrote and said, "My good
friend, we have had such a set of laws for over two thousand years -- they
are known as the Ten Commandments." But in our worship of the gods of elec-
tronics and jet propulsion we've forgotten the God of the Ten Commandments,
we've forgotten the God of the Sermon on the Mount. Regardless, I say to you,
of the complicity of the modern world, there can be no substitute for plain,
every-day personal honesty, for sobriety, for industry, for purity, for
truthfulness. We are absolutely stupid if we think we can outgrow the plain
virtues. It is absolute folly to ignore them. No artificial probes of
government, of science or economics can support for long a society that is
morally rotten at the grass roots. The plain virtues are the keys to human
happiness, the building blocks of a healthy society.

- - that's my introductory remark to you as we come today to
another in the series of sermons being preached on the Ten Commandments.

Now we do well to keep in mind that there are those who maintain, and rightfully so, that you can divide the Ten Commandments into two groups. The first group is this one: the set of Commandments that deals specifically with our relationship to God, a kind of vertical relationship: God and the individual. God says to each of us: "I am God - - don't forget it! And don't make any graven images, and don't misuse my name, or abuse it....and remember, there's one day in the week in which you especially think of Me, that you might recognize My claim upon the other six days in the week"

...so the first set of Commandments deals specifically with God....His Name....and His Day.

Then the others deal primarily with our relationship to our fellow men, a kind of horizontal arrangement. We are to treat others according to our relationship with God.

Now you're not forgetting, are you, that as God was having the Children of Israel led toward the Promised Land, and as they wandered through the wilderness, in His plan for them they came to an abrupt halt. He said, now you've got to stop here a minute and you've got to understand some things before you go any farther - - because they were to be surrounded by other people who did not pattern their lives according to the life-style of the Chosen People. And this is what caused them to run into trouble. So God takes their leader to Mt. Sinai and there reveals to him what he in turn gave to them -- Ten Commandments. Not 'Ten Suggestions'.....not 'Ten options'.....not ten possibilities among other things as far as God's concerned, to say, "If you don't mind, give this some measure of consideration. But ten rules, ten regulations, - - Ten Commandments -- given for our sake. God needs no ego-satisfaction....but for our sakes.

You can't live in a world without authority. You can't live in a world without rules and regulations and laws. I wouldn't want to be part of a group of people who didn't have some respect for certain basic rules and regulations, who didn't have some respect for authority. We've gone through that period, you know, when we thought we could sack authority, when each man could do his own thing and completely ignore an authoritative voice that spoke in behalf of everybody else. But deep inside each one of us there is the recognition of the need for rule and regulation. When you leave this place this morning, and wherever you're parked, if you'll head for Colesville Road, you'll thank God, of course you will, that there happens to be some measure of regulation for the highway or for the street that's out there -- you come to the intersection, there's a sign that says STOP... and if you're driving down Colesville Road, you ought to thank God that there's that sign, some semblance of rule and authority that works in your behalf.

...or you're driving on Colesville Road -- there are the lanes carefully delineated, and you drive with some measure of satisfaction because you believe that other people recognize the fact that one stays in his lane -- for everyone else's good, lest you jeopardize the safety of somebody else . . .

So God in our behalf lays down the law for our good.

Now today we come to the consideration of another one of the Ten Commandments: "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy life may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Isn't it significant that the very first commandment that God lays down regarding society is a law that affects the family? -- the relationship between children and parents, and parents and children. It makes sense, doesn't it? What is society but an extension of the family? What is society but the family of man? And if we're going to

behave as part of the family of man, we have to learn to behave properly as part of our own family. And we begin with respect for authority -- we give honor and respect to those who are over us. Martin Luther, bless his soul, went on to say that this commandment doesn't apply simply to parents, but it applies to all those who have authority over us -- teachers....judges....of-ficers....a Sunday School teacher.

Now if you have a gambling instinct, let me say to you in such an unconventional way as part of the sermon, where would you place your wager right now as the preacher talks to you about this commandment that deals with the interplay between parents and children? -- where is he going to lower the boom? -- on the kids.....or on the parents? You don't know, do you? But I do.

I have been wrestling with this very thing. It could be a very easy thing for me to come to this sacred desk this morning and to come down very heavy upon the younger generation. There's nothing new about this generation gap, there's nothing new about this lack of respect on the part of kids for their elders. The cleavage between the generations is no new thing. It seems to have been part and parcel of life all through history. Here is a well-known quotation -- listen to it:

"The world is passing through troublous times. The young people today think of nothing but themselves. They have no reverence for parents or old age. They are impatient of all restraint, they talk as if they knew everything. And what passes for wisdom with us is foolishness with them. As for girls, they are forward -- immodest -- unwomanly in speech, behaviour, dress . . . "

...am I quoting you from this morning's paper? Yesterday's paper? I could have, perhaps, as a modern-day columnist would write in that fashion. But what I have just read for you is a quotation from a sermon preached in 1274. The problem has always been with us, that the young ought to give respect to their elders.

But I have no intention to come down heavy on the younger generation. Nor do I have any intent to come down heavy on the older generation. I would pray

God that I could speak evenly to both, because I think that's the way the commandment has to be seen.

Now for parents to get it in proper perspective, let me remind you that there are some things that God can't do by Himself. In fact, very few things God ever does by Himself and by Himself alone, unaided. He knows what He wants, and in order to have His plan advanced and His purpose fulfilled, He needs and uses people to assist Him. His preferred instrument is always a human being. Aside from creation, name some of the things that God has done by Himself. Oh, every now and then there's some dramatic evidence, but by and large He's always reaching for a person through whom to work. And that's where parents come into the picture -- He needs us.

Now those of us who are parents and grandparents need to understand it this way: we are God's agents, we're God's representatives, we are to be to our children and to our grandchildren as God! Now that's awesome, but it's absolutely true.

What is that simple definition that we have for God? God is love. And how does God manifest His love except through people! And so God uses people to love, and He begins with those who are nearest and dearest to Him, He begins with the parents, and He says to the parents: "Now you deal with this child as I would deal with this child!

You understand it, don't you, when God wanted to come to us, perfectly and completely, what did He do? He decided to come in human form. And in order to come in human form He turned to two people -- to Mary and to Joseph. And He said, "Now I entrust Jesus to your keeping. You are to cradle Him in your arms, you are to bathe Him, you are to feed Him, you're to direct His course through life."

.....and then think of that exceedingly precious moment when some people came to Jesus one day and they were troubled with this whole busi-

ness of the basic nature and character of God -- "Give us some imagery, tell us what God is like!" And Joseph, God bless him, must have done his work so well that without any hesitation, without any reluctance at all, Jesus said, "Well I'll tell you what God is like -- He's like a father." And every father, every mother is to be as God to their children, to share love and to share trust.

Now, wouldn't it be wonderful if we were all perfect people? But parents are not perfect. And youngsters are not perfect. And that's part of the problem. I say this to you quite parenthetically, I don't know of any facet of the work of the ministry that I dislike, and I am profoundly grateful. Which means I know equal joy in my soul to the working with young people, and I covet for myself the kind of thing that happens in these interviews at Bethany these Sunday afternoons, tedious as it may be from 3:00 until 8:00 o'clock, after a demanding day here in the morning. But it's a precious thing to touch base with them. Not very often, but every now and then a youngster will come to me, taking very seriously the Commandments, and saying, "Pastor,

(not very often now, hear me completely,
but every now and then)

-- "Pastor, I don't know what to do . . .

(they may not phrase it exactly this way)

...." -- but I can't respect my parents." And I know anguish in my soul when I hear them talk like that, because I know parents are not perfect.

And I suppose a sign of maturity is when you and I recognize that our parents were not perfect people. I remember the rude awakening in my soul when I discovered that about my parents, and I shudder with I think how our two sons must deal with that rude awakening when they think of me. We are not perfect. But by the grace of God we're meant to do the best we can, despite our imperfection. And so I plead with any youngster who is prone to say, "I can't respect my parents" -- to admit that they're not perfect, nor is he perfect, and if he

expects perfection from his parents, he must remember how disappointed they may be if they attempt to expect perfection from him.

In the sight of God we are all children. But the fact remains, however, that for our sake God says to parents: You should be honored and you should be respected, and children should give this kind of honor and respect to you. But we have to earn the right to be respected. And that's the great problem that all of us parents have.

Now let's get back to this whole business again to be to children as God, to be to children as one who loves. And love is always to meet the need of another person. And I am absolutely convinced that when love can have its sway, when love can be given a chance, it's always respected. This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE SACREDNESS OF LIFE"
(from the Series based on the Ten Commandments)

GRACE, MERCY AND Peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

given 2:13

I don't know what thoughts ran through your minds as you were listening to the anthem, but one of the things that crossed my mind as I listened to the very first phrase that the choir sang was that it was the exact same words as the beginning sentence of today's Gospel.....and then I had a thought -- I wonder how many people listening now connect the two and feel as if there is any way it would be related to the sermon? Now, dare I ask how many of you remember the first sentence of today's Gospel? Or what the choir sang at the beginning of the anthem:

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

Let's not forget that for a moment as I call to your attention the fact that when people go through the newspaper looking for a new automobile, like as not they are careful to read the small print because there it's stated what guarantees come with the purchase that they'd like to make. You know, when car manufacturers sell cars, they usually put their guarantee on them -- two years - 24,000 miles, whichever comes first. Sometimes the guarantee is more....sometimes the guarantee is less. But you know what happens when that time or the mileage runs out: you're left entirely on your own.

Now in comparison to that, when you give a gift to someone you really care for, something different happens. You don't just give the gift and then turn your back on the person you gave it to. You want to see if the person enjoys the gift, and you don't turn your back on the gift, either -- you're anxious to find out if it really works, and you see to it that no one takes it away from the person that you gave it to.

That's how God gives us life - - not like a car manufacturer, who has to worry about his profit.....but like a lover, who wants to take care of the one that he loves, the gift that he gives. I say this to you as an introductory statement to this sermon that's being preached in the series on the Ten Commandments. And today it's the Fifth Commandment that we give our attention to. It's the Commandment that consists of only four words: You shall not kill.

Do you remember last week that a way of dividing the Commandments was called to our attention. The first three have to do with our relationship to God -- a kind of vertical arrangement; and the remaining seven are thought of in a horizontal fashion -- commandments having to do with our relationships with one another. Having said something to us about where life begins -- in the Fourth Commandment: Honor your father and your mother - - God follows us now in the Fifth Commandment, out of the door of our house, to say something about life and the way we live it with our neighbors.

It ought to be understood from the very beginning - - life is seen by God as something sacred. In fact from the very beginning the Biblical witness is that God is a creator. The Genesis stories tell us that God created the world, the highest and the greatest part of His creation being man. He places a high priority on human life, and man is to have rule over all the creation, and he's entrusted by God to care for it.

Need further evidence of the high value God places on human life? When God chose to come into the world - - in the fullest sense of the word He chose to come in the form of a person. Yet life, as it's related to God, is often mysterious. There's a lot about it that we don't understand. Who among us hasn't had a moment or two when we wondered why we were born? or what purpose our life might serve? or what the future holds for us? or why we have to endure a particular kind of experience? One would have to be insensitive indeed, wouldn't he, to stand at the point of birth, or at the point of death, and not be greatly

moved by a sense of mystery? What a tragedy for a person to live out his days and never come to grips with the fact that their life counts! It's been said that there are two great moments in the life of any person: there is the moment when he is born into the world.....and then there's the moment when he discovers why.

To know that your life has a purpose, that behind everything that you do there's a meaning - - that's what makes life worth living. If life only has meaning for us when we can see it in relationship with something else, and when you can link together the giver and the gift, then a big piece of the puzzle of life fits together.

So let's keep in mind, then, that from God's point of view -- life is sacred, and every one of us is taken seriously by God. And what we do with our life matters to Him, and life as God sees it is always in terms of relationships.

It's a fact, so psychologists tell us, and it's Scriptural too, that no one can be true to himself unless he has a loving relationship to other people. It's also true, isn't it, that we are shaped by those who love us and those who refuse to love us. Now think about that for a minute - - - who are the people in your life that have made you what you are? Have you ever noticed the difference that it makes this time of the year when the bloom of spring captures someone's heart because someone else pays attention to them? Spring is the time when a young man's heart turns to love . . . it makes a difference, doesn't it?

Or, have you ever noticed the difference that it makes when someone's been rejected, and the spring's been taken out of their step? You see, life is so relational -- me-to-you -- you-to-me -- you-to-somebody-else.....and so it goes. And when God gives the Commandments He recognizes the fact that we have a relationship within our home. So the Fourth Commandment deals with father and mother. But then there is the recognition of the fact that we live in a larger family. And so there's the Fifth Commandment that has to do with the fact that we live

as part of the family of man.

Sometimes it takes a disaster to remind us of this fact that we're all related to one another. But not too many years ago that point was driven home even within the membership of this congregation, when we could not stand by and know that within two hours' drive from here there were people whose lives were devastated when that terrible storm called Agnes took its toll, and week after week, carload after carload -- how many numbers of people were there, who made the trek northward to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to help people dig out of the mud, to recover from the flood - people whose names we did not know. But all that really mattered was that they had a desperate need. They were our neighbors . . . we could not stand idly by.

But you might be thinking to yourself at this point: What does all of this have to do with the Fifth Commandment? For doesn't the Commandment read: You shall not kill - - responding to a disaster or looking upon someone else as a brother or sister of the human family - - what's that have to do with killing?...or with murder?

What do you suppose the results would be if you were to conduct a poll this morning and ask people what they think is the most important of the Ten Commandments? I'd be willing to bet that it would be this one. For who among us wants to live in a world where life does not have value and where killing and murder goes on without restraint? So then, if we place such a high priority on keeping this Commandment, what's to be said about it?

Would you believe me if I told you that this Commandment, as Luther explained it, has much more to do with murder than the taking of another's life....and if you're anticipating some word this morning about capital punishment, euthanasia, or any other such related to that, you're probably going to be disappointed. What this Commandment focuses upon is much more basic to the daily contact that we have with each other. Surely what it has to deal with provides

a basis for wrestling with some of the more complex issues of life. Because first and foremost the Commandment reminds us that all life is sacred. It's created, it's given by God.

But what about the second part of the Commandment in terms of keeping it? What is it that kills? A couple of years ago there was a best seller that was made into a movie called "The Anatomy of a Murder." It was a story that took apart, step by step, what it was that brought an end to a victim. And the interplay between the characters, the way they treated one another -- that's what made the story so interesting and full of suspense.

But the anatomy of any murder begins in the heart. The thought is the father of the deed. And if you need a few examples, here are a couple . . .

- - you know, a person can kill by rejection. For some people that's the cruelest blow that life can deal, to be ignored, to try to live as if you do not matter at all to somebody else, that your life doesn't count.....why should you go on? . . .

- - you know, a person can kill enthusiasm. You watch what kind of reaction you get sometimes when somebody comes running to you because they have a new idea that they've just discovered something.....and you tell them that it's stupid, or that it's already been thought of by somebody before....or what they have to say isn't worth listening to . . .

- - and oh, if looks could kill - - just the way we look sometimes at one another can be devastating. Have you ever had the experience of looking into someone's eyes that were filled with anger? What a crushing blow that can be to the human spirit - - such a strong message is being communicated without a single word being spoken.

And the list could go on: malice.....gossip -- that's a good one: gossip --

how many people have been killed by gossip, suffered from character assassination? What a cruel way to die, and have your reputation ruined by lies, crude talk. . . . and anger -- there's another one. The world would be a sorry place if every angry thought resulted in a deed. We take a lot of comfort, don't we, in the fact that we don't do what we have a mind to do. . . . there is name-calling....we tell ethnic stories so the list could go on! The intent of the heart is more serious than the deed itself.

And if you want to argue that point, then you're going to have to take on Jesus Christ himself, because He laid the cards on the table with those who thought they were living within the law. You might remember that in the Sermon on the Mount He said to them: "You have heard it said that men of old, you shall not kill, and whoever kills shall be libel to judgment . . ." I mean, after all, He was familiar with the Jewish law, and He did know that it provided some very severe punishment for those who took another person's life . . . "But I say to you, " Jesus said, as He made broader implication of the Commandment, "that anyone who is angry with his brother is libel to judgment, and whoever insults his brother shall be libel to the council . . ." Now that's putting it on the line! God judges not only what we do, but our motives for doing it. He's concerned about what lies in the heart. To insult another person, to show contempt for him, to look down on a person with a sneer as though he were inferior to you - - then you're ignoring God's will that we accept all people as He does.

But no matter what a person may be like - - and here's the hard part for some people to swallow - - he's loved by God. He's not completely worthless, and you cannot write him off as though he did not exist.

It's easy to love your friends, but you get down to the nitty-gritty of this Commandment and you talk about expressing some kind of concern for your enemy, and basic to all this Commandment by recognizing that life belongs to God, and that it's not cheap, and a price has been paid for it, and that it

has value. And it cannot be taken for granted as though it doesn't matter.

Do you know that studies show that by the time a young person graduates from high school he has seen more than 18,000 murders on television . . . do you think it's possible that a person can become immune to the value of life? Do we live in such a world that detachment is the social norm? and no one wants to get involved because it is become a lack of respect of the value of the human soul. That does happen, you know. And that's why we can have a victim for robbery, for a rape, for a beating -- scream out for help in the midst of a crowdand no one stops, but just keeps on passing by. The Commandment deals with the fact that life is sacred.

Several years ago there was a hit on Broadway that is still being repeated by summer stock theaters. It's called: "I Remember Mama" . . . and Mama is this wonderful old character who always saw the best in everybody. If she couldn't see it readily, then she looked for it. But that wasn't the case with her sister, Mrs. Solfelt -- she only saw the things that were wrong in people, and especially in her brother Christopher. Mama understood Chris, but her sister always looked upon her brother as no good, a down-and-out drunkard.

....when Uncle Chris died, all the family gathered in his little room because somehow or other they felt that Uncle Chris must have left them something in his will. Then there comes the moment in the play when Mama walks into the room with a little account book in her hand, and she looks at the little group, including her sister, and she says, "There will be no will -- and there's no money either." Mrs. Solfelt jumps to her feet, points to her sister and says, "What's that you have in your hand? -- all the bills from the liquor store" . . .and Mama says, "No. Let me read it to you. You know how Uncle Chris was lame? -- and how he always walked with a limp? It was his one thought -- lame people. He would have liked to be a doctor, but instead he helped them in other ways. Look what's on the last page: Joseph

Spinelli -- 14 years old - tubercular left leg - \$337.18 (walks now) . . "

"Esther Jensen - 9 years - club foot - \$217.50 (walks now) . . "

"Arnie Solfelt -- 9 years -- fractured knee cap -- \$442.16 . . "

...and just then Arnie comes rushing into the room. His mother
didn't know what Chris had done for him....

And Mama says, "It doesn't tell the end about Arnie - - I'd like to write:

"walks now - - yes, maybe even runs."

This Commandment was intended to make us walk as people who look at the
world through God's eyes, that all life is sacred. And it's not the keeping of
the law that's important - - it's not the keeping of the letter of the law
that's important - - - but the spirit as well.

You know, there's a saying in the Book of Proverbs
that we can justify our every deed....but God
looks at our motives.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"SOMEBODY'S DAUGHTER/SISTER"
(Sixth in the Series on the Ten Commandments)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Evangelical 20:14

We continue today the series of sermons based upon the general theme of The Ten Commandments. Each sermon has been introduced with a prefatory remark. Hear now what's to be said at the very beginning today. Jonathan Swift once said, "I have never been surprised to find men wicked, but I have often been surprised to find them not ashamed."

This points to what Joseph Wood Crutch has called "The New Immorality" - - there has always been wickedness among men, but never until now have so many apparently accepted it and taken it for granted -- such things as personal dignity, saying in effect: "Everyone does it - - I can't see that it really hurts anybody"so we speak today, we who are drawing the benefit of a permissive generation.

How did it happen? It didn't just happen. In "No, No Calcutta" which tells the story of how the showing of that musical was banned in South Australia, Dr. John Count, the psychologist, uses a significant illustration. He tells of what he calls a classical psychological experience....

...a frog was placed in cold water, and then the temperature was slowly and imperceptibly increased. Eventually the temperature reached the boiling point, that is, eventually, but as you know now, only gradually. Yet all this time the frog makes no effort to escape, because the change occurred so slowly. There was no recognition of danger. But eventually the frog died, making no attempt whatsoever at self-preservation.....

So, someone has observed, it is with smoking. If the effects of smoking were immediately visible, then the smoker would stop smoking. But we are told the effect is going to take twenty years to arrive, as it did in the case of my brother it worked so gradually, but then the damage was done. So it is suggested by analogy, that there could be what might be called a "moral desensitization, which happens so gradually that one day, all unexpectedly, we wake up and find the standards destroyed and irreparable damage is done.

That's why, do I have to tell you again, I come back with all the strength that I can command to ask you to give heed to the Ten Commandments. For it does seem to some of us in recent years that we've become insensitive to them, and permit ourselves to believe that we can ignore them. And then every now and then we painfully recognize the fact that there's damage done. It was a wise man who said: You don't break the Commandments - - but failure to observe them and respect them can break you!

Now today in the series it's the Commandment: Thou shalt not commit adultery.....

I can only tell it to you as it was:

- - There is the paradox of human nature that there was no sin regarded in Judiasm that was regarded with greater horror than adultery. And there was no sin which, to judge by the sages and prophets, which was more common. It's written in the Book of Proverbs, the 6th chapter, the 32nd verse:

"He who commits adultery has no sense; he who does it destroys himself."

I can only tell it to you as it was:

- - I can only tell it to you as it's been written - - I can only tell it to you as it's been echoed as the voice of God. The fact remains that the writings of the rebukes of the prophets make it clear that the horror that was attached to the sin of

adultery did not stop its being committed. I can only tell it to you as it's written -- in Jeremiah, the 5th chapter, verses 7,8 one reads:

"How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken me, and have sworn by those who are no gods. When I fed them to the full, they committed adultery and trooped to the houses of harlots. They were well-fed lusty stallions, each neighing for his neighbor's wife."

I can only tell it to you as it was -- in the eyes of the old Jew, adultery was especially the crime committed against the marriage bed.

I can only tell it to you as it was:

-- in primitive times it was general for the husband to have the right to kill any man who seduced his wife -- partly because adultery was a crime against property, and partly because the whole structure of society was built upon the family. This explains why in the ancient codes the penalty for adultery was death. It is written in Leviticus, the 20th chapter, the 10th verse:

"If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adultrless shall be put to death"

It is written in the Book of Deuteronomy:

"If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, a man who lies with the woman, and the woman likewise. So you shall purge the evil from Israel"

I can only tell it to you as it was:

-- In days gone by if a woman was accused of adultery, she was taken in what we would call the village square, and in sight of all the people who had quickly come, her clothes were stripped from her breasts and her breasts were exposed -- for, said they, you have exposed yourself to a man who is not your husband, and

now in shame you are exposed to all of us . . .

...but that was not enough. According to their ritual, they had prepared for her to eat the coarsest of all grain that was fed to animals, and she was forced to eat it, the conclusion being, you have been as an animal, with an uncontrolled appetite.....and then if they had reason to believe that she had actually committed adultery, they would reach for the stones and they would stone her to death, along with the man who was involved - - I can only tell it to you as it was.....

Now why, you want to ask, do you? -- we who are arrogant enough as to put questions to God -- why do you come down so heavy against this sin, God? Why do you make it punishable by death as once it was?

But there's an answer, of course. What is most precious in the sight of God? Honestly now, ask yourself that question: what is most precious to God? And you know the answer. The thing most precious to God is a human being...and a human being isn't a thing, and a human being isn't an animal. A human being isn't meant to have undisciplined appetite....a human being isn't meant to be exploited as a thing that's picked up at will and put aside when the pleasure has run its course.

In God's plan for us He placed a high value upon the family. And to preserve the sanctity of the family He rules against anything that allows the violation of the marriage bed - - because He places a high value upon a human being.

And how we have a generation on our hands that parades this business of sex - - talks openly about it and displays it freely -- this thing called sex which was meant to be a perfectly beautiful thing - - - between the man and the woman who belong to each other, nothing is more beautiful than this complete identifi-

cation, when soul and body cry out to each other. That's why we have a word for it -- when it reaches the ultimate we call it consummation -- a perfectly beautiful thing. But we have a generation on our hands that parades it, talks openly about it and displays it freely. They've done quite a job of talking about what comes naturally. But they haven't gone far enough. Honestly, they haven't. They can tell us how it all starts: strong desires and powerful urges. When will they tell us how it all ends? God knew. And that's the point that the Hebraic-Christian tradition has been dealing with for centuries.

Now for a moment -- what's so wrong about adultery, if two people could be drawn to each other? Indulge me for a little while, I'm nostalgic yet. As some of you may know, I went back home to the 'hills-of-home' last Sunday and had the good fortune to preach where I had been cradled in my mother's arms and brought for baptism, where I was named for Jesus Christ....I stood within the very shadow of the altar where the holy hands of a godly man confirmed me in the Christian faith fifty-one years ago. It was more than a sentimental journey....

....I thought of the street on which I lived, where I played
and where people helped to bring me up -- the people who have
known me as no other people have ever known me.....

And I remembered two things in particular -- I remembered the house where Carlton Bennett's grandfather lived, and had a back porch. And those were the days when milk was delivered daily in bottles, and where you washed the bottle after you emptied the contents and got it ready for the milk-man to pick up the next day -- you put 10¢ in the bottle or you put in a ticket, and for that value he gave you another quart of milk.....

....I saw a nickel and five pennies in that milk bottle
one day. It was too much for me -- I took three or five
pennies, I've forgotten which. Eventually my mother
discovered it in my possession. She knew nothing about

childhood and adolescent psychology - - - she only knew one thing: I had done something that I shouldn't have done. She didn't ask herself, what will happen to Raymond's personality if I press the point?...embarrass him? - - - she didn't ask any of those questions. She only knew that I had something that didn't belong to me. And to the day I die, and as God gives me memory, I'll hear to my soul's well-being her words: "Take it back, Raymond - - it doesn't belong to you."

Now that's what's wrong with adultery -- we take something that doesn't belong to us. And the hardest lesson for two people who may thoroughly enjoy their relationship is the recognition of the sad and sober thought that there are some things that are not ours to give, and there are some things that are not ours to take. That's what's wrong with adultery -- some things you can't give, and some things you can't take, no matter how well you may rationalize - -

"Take it back -- it's not yours!"

I reflect upon it on more than one occasion when I stand with a couple making promises to each other and rings are slipped on each other's fingers. What does that ring represent? -- the fact that there are two people who belong to each other as they do not belong to anybody else, that's what that ring represents - - "I belong to him, and he belongs to me" - - - in the old Prayer Book of the Anglican Church, when the rings were exchanged they had such words as these: " . . . and with my body I thee honor . . . " That's what's wrong with adultery -- the giving of what's not yours to give....the taking of what isn't yours to take.

Now indulge me again. My first main job and how I got to know the streets of Williamsport was to work on a milk wagon. I got 50¢ a day. In the summer-time we chopped the ice and covered the milk bottles in the crates and covered it with canvas to keep it from spoiling.....in the winter-time we had the problem of the milk freezing and the caps being raised up -- you can picture it, some of

you. But what I want to tell you is that one day the man who owned the milk route was somewhat troubled because a stranger came, not a regular customer, and he made a purchase on the street -- a half-pint of cream, a pint of milk and a quart of milk....and as he walked away the man who owned the route was somewhat troubled and he said, "This may not be the last I'll see this man or hear from him." And in my curiosity I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "He's an inspector."and in those days they made periodic inspections because there were some milk men who would stretch their dollars by stretching their milk -- they would add water -- and so these tests would be made periodically. And that was my first introduction to the word adultery. They were on guard lest milk would be adulterated.

And what was that? It was simply cheapening the product -- introducing an ingredient that really didn't belong there, making it something inferior, if not less than pure. And that's what's wrong with adultery -- it cheapens the relationship, makes it less than what it's meant to be.

I'm going to suggest to our Associate Pastor, who directs our Youth Ministry, that he buy a supply of what I'm going to read to you now. It's called "A Letter To Teenage Friends" - - -

" . . . I'm not surprised at your confusion over the question of sexual morality. The world around you is uncertain and speaks with many conflicting voices; although I don't pretend to have the final word, nevertheless I'm glad you have given me the opportunity to try to clarify the matter for you.

When your parents tell you that sex is the bond of marriage and must be reserved for that purpose, they are not being blatantly old-fashioned. Neither are they, in the name of some arbitrary morality, trying to deprive you of freedom and pleasure. Morality, after all, derives from the experience of mankind as to what is good for people and what is harmful. Your parents speak with love out of a greater knowledge than yours to protect you from potential misfortune which they understand, but which you as yet do not.

" . . . From what you have told me of your thinking on this matter, I believe there are two things that you need to know. The first is that sex is not always the beautiful thing you envision. It can be, of course, within the protecting walls of a life-long exclusive marital commitment. But sex, when it is abused, becomes an ugly, horrible thing that brings not pleasure but pain, and suffering, and sorrow. Don't let the mythology of the movies and novels persuade you that illicit extramarital sex is glamorous and thrilling. It is usually furtive, awkward, sordid. Its pleasures are fleeting and its painful consequences may be lifelong. It does not deepen, strengthen and beautify an affectionate relationship which marital sex may do, but leads almost invariably to contempt and hatred.

The other thing you need to know is that sex is dangerous, like dynamite. It serves an important purpose when properly handled but it destroys people when it is not. I am not referring solely to such things as venereal disease and illegitimate pregnancies -- although both of these are far greater dangers than you think, and doctors and clergymen see a constant procession of sad and frightened youngsters who thought they knew how to take care of themselves. I'm referring more to the traumatic psychological effects of promiscuous behavior, which often lie deeply buried in the subconscious mind and play havoc in the later life, making people incapable of mature adult relationships, wrecking marriages and destroying innocent children.

Sex is not to play with, my friends -- it is not a form of recreation or entertainment. It is the bond of marriage, the means of parenthood and a source of joy when used as God intended. When it is taken out of the content of marital bonds it is as dangerous as a game of catch with a live hand grenade.

Perhaps the foregoing will help you to see what we parents and counsellors mean when we say that extra-marital sex is wrong. We do not mean merely that it is destructive-dangerous, but it takes something of beauty and makes it ugly -- but it produces not happiness and well-being but makes suffering and sorrow. That's what we mean when we say it's wrong. I hope you can see, therefore, that your parents, far from trying to deprive you of any good thing, are in fact trying to keep you from prematurely seizing and ruining this wonderful but fragile thing called sex. They are trying to see that you in your youthful eagerness do not throw away your own future happiness . . . "

Now I must conclude the sermon by telling you that I'm perfectly aware of the fact that I'm a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it

well be that in this group now present, as could be true of almost any group that you might find anywhere, there are some who have committed the sin of adultery. I must tell you this: adultery is a sin. But adultery is not the only sin.

And as a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ I declare to you that sin can be forgiven. That's the wonderful thing about it. And you can read for yourself how they brought to Jesus Christ a woman caught in the very act of adultery, and they wanted to stone her to death. And Jesus Christ said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

...you know how the story goes, there wasn't a single stone reached for. And Jesus said, "Where are your accusers?" And none raised his voice nor his hand. And Jesus Christ said, "Neither do I condemn you - - go, and sin no more."

...but occasionally I've discovered in my relationship with people that when the sin has been committed, and the person who committed it is truly sorry, and asks to be forgiven - - occasionally, not very often, but occasionally - - the other refuses to forgive. And that, I say to you with all the strength that I can command, is a greater sin.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE GREATEST THIEF"
(Seventh in the Series of Sermons on the Ten
Commandments)

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Galatians 2:15

Today we come to the concluding section in the study of the Ten Commandments. Only a few more remain to be considered. Today's Commandment that warrants attention is a very simple directive: Thou shalt not steal.

If you were to exercise your mind by listing the Commandments according to their priority, where would you put this one? There is no question where you would put the first one, because the first Commandment is basic to all the Commandments. The rest have no meaning until you first reckon with the fact that God is God, and His authority is to be revered and respected . . . but this one: Thou shalt not steal -- how important do you think it to be?

If you were a business man, there's no question how important you would think it to be, and as a consumer, there is no question as to how important you should think it to be. Some of us have to pay the prices that we pay just because people pilfer -- the loss in merchandise is absolutely appalling, to say nothing of the expense involved in securing the necessary safeguards against pilfering and stealing. If you were a merchant, there's no question as to how important you would think this Commandment to be.

By the same token, if you've ever been victimized, you would know how important this Commandment is. Interestingly enough, when God gave this Commandment, it's a Commandment that deals with material possessions. The Children of Israel had very little material possessions, you know that. They were a people on the march. There wasn't a single one of them who had a key to a safe deposit box.... there wasn't a single one of them who had a deed to a piece of real estate.... there wasn't a single one of them who had a house that he could call his very own

property. What they had: a fair amount of cattle and live-stock, perhaps, the clothing on their backs - - that was about it. They were a people on the march. And yet God says, among the ten things that He gave them as specific rules, this one regarding property.

Well, you may say to yourself, if a man has a great deal, if somebody were to steal something, it wouldn't be very important. But stealing is stealing, Robin Hood notwithstanding. And on the other hand you may quickly say to yourself, if a man has very little, then of course what he has is exceedingly precious to him, and if it were to be taken from him it would be a great loss.

Now one also is quick to say to himself, I thought God was interested in spiritual things! When you talk about the Commandment, Thou shalt not steal, you're thinking in terms of property, material things. Are material things important to God? And the answer, of course, is Yes. . . . so much so that there are those who maintain, and I think quite properly so, that Christianity is the most materialistic of all religions, because Christianity is always telling us the kind of value that we ought to place on material things....because you cannot associate a person apart from the things that he possesses. Tell me about the things you own, tell me about the material things that you value, and I'll tell you something about your character. A person is as he thinks....a person is as he does.....a person is according to the things that he grasps and calls his very own.

Do I have to tell you what you already know, that there are only three ways by which you come into possession of things? You're right -- the first way is by the sweat of your brow, by the exercise of your talent, by your day's work. You get a hold of certain things that you're able to possess because you've worked for them.

The second way you happen to have possession of certain things is because somebody's been kind enough and generous enough to give them to you. During their lifetime they've said: we want you to have this. And what joy we know

when we're thought of so kindly and so generously.....and who hasn't been thrilled to high heaven to discover that he's been remembered in somebody's will, as in the last will and testament that somebody prepared they wanted you to have something.

But there's a third way by which a person may come into possession of certain things. It's a very ugly way -- by stealth or by force. He steals. He robs from another person.

God looks with favor upon the first two -- God wants us to work hard and to be able to earn our way.....and God encourages us to be generous and to think in terms of other people with what we have. God frowns and curses on a man who would take by stealth or force what would belong to somebody else.

Now you may ask me, tell me now in plain, unvarnished language -- what's wrong about stealing?

The thing that's wrong about it is that nobody would want to live in a society where people steal. Let me put it for you this way as sometimes I put it to boys and girls in Confirmation Class -- God gave the Ten Commandments from a human perspective for two reasons: first, He wanted to protect them against a society in which they would find themselves living once they had arrived at their destination. They would be surrounded by a people of different mores, they'd be exposed to an entirely different ethical and moral scheme. They were meant to be different. God had high hopes for them, they were to be a kind of Exhibit A as to how people could live together, and live together exceedingly well. And so that's why He gives them the rules and the regulations according to a manufacturer's manual: "This is how you can best get along with one another."

The second reason: God wants us to be content with one another. God wants us to live together in peace and harmony, with trust and respect for one another. When you start stealing, you disrupt that.

Let me give you a very simple homespun illustration: I go back to my college days, the days of the Great Depression as we knew it. We sent our laundry back home in those laundry packets or cases some of you may readily recall. I lived on the third floor of a very simple dormitory.

....I was exceedingly thrilled, honestly I was, when I went to my new situation to discover that I was surrounded by people who seemed to trust one another. There wasn't a single room that was locked in that dormitory, and we went back and forth into one another's rooms, freely, very easily.....

This element of trust and respect created a very happy atmosphere and made life on campus a very pleasant thing.

But then one day, after the mid-term, the fellow who roomed next to me discovered that a five-dollar bill had been taken out of his laundry case, where he had put it, probably his mother had sent it to him.

....the atmosphere changed completely. Every single one of us who lived in that dormitory was suspect. It couldn't be otherwise - - we hadn't any reason to believe that somebody from outside came in, we were that removed from the town. And then, eventually, I found that people were reaching for keys, and doors were being locked, and one became a bit troubled when he went through the door where ordinarily he could very easily have walked in, to find it now locked. It created an entirely different atmosphere - - no longer was there this feeling of trust.....

That's what's wrong with stealing. We begin to lose faith in one another. We no longer have that harmony and good will and respect.

I told you last Sunday that the thing that's most precious to God is a human soul, a person. And when we steal, we do something to that person. His whole personality is affected by it - - it isn't simply that something's taken away - - it's the fact that that person has been offended. You know very well

what I mean.

I could go on in the sermon, if time would permit, to tell you how in ways that we seldom think a person can steal. It's not simply reaching into somebody else's pocket, it's not simply defrauding somebody else, or taking from a shelf or a display booth. A person can steal from God by keeping from God the better part of his nature. God knows our potential, God knows how much we can love, God knows how good we could be. But we can steal from God when we keep from Him so great a blessing.

Do I have to tell you how we can steal and keep from those who are nearest to us by virtue of our relationship with them are the only ones who could care? There are certain things that I as a son could give my father that nobody else could give him, and every time I gave him less than what a son should give his father, I robbed my father....

....there were certain things that I as a son could give my mother that only a son could give my mother, and every time I was less than a son should have been to a mother, I robbed her, I kept from her -- I stole for myself what was rightfully hers.

In the final analysis, this is what's wrong with stealing: it's a sin against God, because from the Christian perspective everything that we have belongs to God. I may put my name on the deed, I may put my name on the stocks and bonds, but in essence everything that I have and everything that you have is on deposit by God, to be used by Him.

Today in the calendar of the Church is Pentecost, when many of us will remember how we made vows and promises to be the kind of person that God wants us to be (Reaffirmation of Confirmation vows by congregation)

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A LIE IS A LIE"
(Sermon based on the Ten Commandment)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Good 26:16

Today's sermon is the next-to-the-last in the series dealing with the Ten Commandments, and we're about to consider the Commandment: "Thou shalt not bear false witness."

Presumably with tongue in cheek Mark Twain on one occasion observed, there are 869 different ways to tell a lie. Anyone who has had any experience at all in the telling of lies knows full well that there are big lies and little lies -- white lies, half-truths, dark and ugly lies. What now is to be said regarding this? Well let's consider the Commandment as it's fully stated -- not simply "Thou shalt not bear false witness" . . . but the Commandment puts it specifically: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."

There is not one word in the English language for 'false witness' -- are you aware of that? There is not one word in the English language for 'false witness.' To the contrary, there are many, many words. There is no word, it's been said, in English which has so many equivalents -- such as:

calumny . . . slander . . . misrepresentation . . . vituperation
. . . insult . . . scurrility . . . railing . . . detraction . .
. . . whispering . . . back-biting . . . depreciation . . . vilification
. . . innuendo . . . abuse . . . tattle . . . insolence . . .
. . . sneering . . . taunting . . . jibes . . . jeers . . .
. . . defamation . . . libel . . . satire . . . sarcasm . . .
lampoon . . . sensoriousness . . . tale-bearing . . . malice
. . . spite . . . envy . . . evil-surmising . . . gossip . . .

....it's been said there is no word that has so many equivalents in the English language. So great importance we take in our consideration this bearing of false witness.

It's an exceedingly interesting thing to note that so far as the society of Israel was concerned, it was not simply the giving of the Ten Commandments that they took seriously. It was the application of the Ten Commandments to society.

Are you aware of the fact that as far as the law of Moses is concerned, there are three general enactments which formed part of the social law of Israel regarding this specific Commandment? -- vetoes, which were introduced in order to undo so far as was possible the effects of evil speaking and to make people shrink from the habit of evil-speaking. As an example regarding this Commandment: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor

- - the first enactment was that a man should never be condemned upon the evidence of one witness. According to good Jewish tradition, at the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established. Moses decreed that no one man's word should ever be sufficient to condemn another. . . .

Let me pause at that point quite parenthetically and ask you how well you apply that test when someone comes and tells you something about someone else? How quick are you to believe the first person who reports to you what may in the end be false testimony concerning somebody else? So stained are we by original sin that it seems a lot easier for us to believe ill regarding somebody else than to believe good.....

.....in the application of this basic Commandment Moses so decreed a series of three enactments, and the first one was this: that you have to get the testimony from more than one person.

- - the second decree which Moses ordained with a view to stamping

out the pernicious habit of slander had the effect of putting upon the tale-bearer himself the whole responsibility for the condemnation and the punishment of the person he had accused. According to the law of Moses, the slanderer who brought the accusation had by his own hand to cast the first stone at the man being accused. The slanderer, that is to say, had to see the full effect of his own words.....as much as to suggest, if I bring this charge, if I speak this slander -- if I bear this tale, what will be the final result if this man is found guilty?

....he had to see in his fellow man, standing alone and naked before him....he had to stoop himself and lift the first stone....he had to fling that stone at the shrinking figure who stood some paces from him . . . he had to hear the thud of that stone, and listen to the other stones from the hands of others which his act had set loose . . . he had to meet the eyes of the dying man. And if the story was a lie, then the torments of hell would begin to be stirred up in the slanderer's breast.

-- that was the second enactment by Moses: "You bring the charge -- then you cast the first stone in view of other people as the man stands naked before you -- you look him straight into the eye!"

It can be freely translated that Moses perhaps was the kind of a man that if somebody came bearing a tale about another man, he would say, "Now that you've told me I cannot help but know it. But we can't stop at this point. And since I have some measure of responsibility in this regard, you come with me now and you tell that man what you just told me -- you tell him, face-to-face." That's the way Moses would have handled it.

There was a third decree, and that simply was this: that if one brought testimony and it was proven false -- then the person who brought the false testi-

mony would receive the punishment that the other person would have received had he been found guilty.

...so the people of Israel took seriously this Commandment and endeavored to stamp out pernicious false-bearing witness.

Now as I stand at this sacred desk I must tell you what I honestly believe, that man is by nature a social being. He cannot go it by himself, and he is made strong by the bonds that hold him. Had that ever occurred to you, that you and I are made strong by the bonds by which we are held!

Take the spiritual bond, or the religious bond - - haven't I told you before that that word religion comes from the Latin that means "to be held by, to be bound to" - - and you and I are made strong because we're bound by God. So there's that spiritual or religious bond with which we must deal as God gave us the Commandment: "I am the Lord thy God" -- remember whose you are and whom you are meant to serve - - I am bound to you, you are meant to be bound to me -- don't let anything sever that bond." And so God gave the Commandment, "Give me due and proper respect . . . "

There is the family bond -- the bond by which we are held by those to whom we are nearest and dearest . . . and so God gave the Commandment regarding how important this family bond is : Respect for parents and elders . . .

There is a blood bond.....we are knit together in this fabric of humanity, and all life is to be seen as sacred, and so God gives the Commandment: "You don't kill - - you keep this bond sacrosanct with your fellow men - - you don't murder."

There is a sex bond . . . we are held together by those with whom we are associated sexually. And because that's a very precious and a fragile thing, God writes into the Commandments a measure of protection for the sex bond -- You don't commit adultery . . .

There's the property bond - - some of us are held by the things that we possess, and as I told you the other Sunday, you can't separate a man from the

things that are important to him, and because they are meant to have value, because they belong to somebody, God gives us the Commandment: You don't steal, you don't take what belongs to somebody else.

And interestingly enough, perhaps you haven't thought about it, there is the language bond - - we are held together with one another by the words that we speak. There are certain words that you have spoken to me that have endeared you to my soul. When I look back across the years and think of those who encouraged me in my Christian commitment, when I think of those who spoke the right word at the right time in the right way to keep me from falling -- the very encouragement that I've needed most -- I've been bonded and I have been held and I have been sustained by words that have been spoken. There is this language bond - - - and because that bond can be abused - - words can heal, and words can kill.....

-- with my lips I can speak the truth

...and with my lips I can lie.

-- with my lips I can speak words that can set a song

in your soul.....with my lips I can cut you to the quick.

Words are precious.

Words are important. They hold us to one another, or they can separate us.

I have a high regard for a physician friend of mine who once told me, when I had an appointment with him, how the word had just come to the man that he was going to see next about a unfortunate thing in the life of his daughter. And he said, "I dread seeing this man because of the hate that's going to swell up within his soul. And you know what I'm going to say to him? I'm going to say to him, when I see him, 'Now take pause for a moment, and realize that when you see your daughter for the first time, that whatever words you speak to her are going to determine your relationship from that time onward' . . ." Words are that important.

We can speak the truth in love . . . we can lie. God says, you don't lie -- you speak the truth.

But good people have been known to lie. And you're not forgetting, are you, that these Commandments were given to God's people! - - not to strangers and aliens. These Commandments were given to people whom God loved, and in whom He was making so great an investment.

Good people have been known to lie. Good people lie because they're not perfect. Every single one of us is stained by original sin.

I can understand why people lie because I've never forgotten the first lie I told my mother, and how she could probe the depth of my soul. I understood why I lied. I also understood why I should never have lied.

If a mother can be forgiving to her child, how much more forgiving can God be to us, His children? And if anyone should ever lie to you -- begin at this point, my friend, and say to yourself - - there but for the grace of God could be I!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TO BE CONTENT"

(Last in the series of sermons based on the
Ten Commandments - IX and X)

index 2c.17

This sermon concludes a series that's been preached from this pulpit over the past eight weeks. The focus of our attention has been the Ten Commandments, those rules for life that God gave to His children called Israel. And as the sermon series concludes today we consider the Ninth and the Tenth Commandments together, for both have to deal with the same issue, and specifically with that word covet.

Now the two Commandments read like this:

"Thou shalt not covet your neighbor's house,
you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor
his servants, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor
anything that is your neighbor's."

It is simply to say, boiled down into one sentence, that we're talking about a desire, a desire to have that which does not belong to us.

Living in the kind of world in which we do, it seems that just about anything that we would ever wish or want is easily within our grasp. So what's the big fuss? We live in an abundant age. More often than not our thinking is such that if we want something, we really need something, we can buy it. Does the fact that the Commandments that we're considering today are numbered Nine and Ten on the list make them any less important than Commandment number Five, or Six, or Seven? Whether you're thinking it or not, these are two tough Commandments to deal with.

Up to now, as this sermon series has unfolded, we have been talking about Commandments that have to do with our relationship to other people, or the way we live in society. But these two Commandments -- they are tougher in a way because they deal with a person's inner thoughts. It's one thing to talk about controlling your actions - - it's an entirely different matter when we

talk about controlling your feelings, and what you think, and your emotions. For these two Commandments are the kind that can be broken without the knowledge of any other person.

I don't know what your understanding of the word covet is. But you're right if you define it this way: that to covet something is to desire to possess, to wish, to lust, to seek after. But literally speaking, the word means to pant after - - that is, to go after something to the point of exhaustion. To covet something is to desire that which you don't possess. And that in itself is not bad, for who among us doesn't have a hero that we can call to mind who has certain traits in character that we'd like to emulate, or has a certain aspect about his life after which we'd like to pattern ours? The careful reading of the Commandment of course reveals that there is a place for desire within the heart. But what is not allowed in God's scheme of things is the desire to have that which we have no right to possess.

Now, no matter how a person reads history, you'll have to allow for the fact that down through the centuries the great struggle has always been between the "haves" and the "have-nots." This Commandment says that there are some things that you have no right to possess.

But there's a bit more to this business of coveting. The way the Greeks used the word, in its original meaning, they understood it as a desire to have more, the desire to go after something as if to crave it and not be satisfied until it was in your hands, and it was a word that was used to describe a detested quality in a man's personality, and no where in the Greek world was it ever used in a positive way.

There is, in a certain sense, a coming face-to-face with the basic part of human nature in this Commandment - - we're so built and constructed that desire is instinctive. It's one of the strongest parts of our being. But the value of any powerful force depends on what use we make of it. The urge to

want -- the desire to have -- the drive to be -- all of these can get to the point where they can so control us that they can be destructive. You think of the simplest desire that you have as it's related to the drive to gain material possessions, especially the things that money can buy, and then you band that over against the fact that it's by acquiring things that we do support ourselves and we do provide for the people who depend on us. But it's when trying to acquire things gets out of proportion, life turns sour. The drive and the desire to have can lead to dishonesty -- the sense of fairness in our relationship disappears and all we can think about is getting what we want, no matter what the price, no matter what we have to do to get it.

And so the consequences for ourselves and for others is never thought of and the drive is so strong and desire to have becomes so great it can lead to exploitation. The power of greed takes over and the use of others is a method we use for selfish means. You know, that's one of the reasons we have the Child Labor Laws we do in this country, that at one time in our history employers took advantage of young children in order to turn a profit in their business. The working conditions were unsafe and the hours were long, and there was no concern expressed for the health and the welfare of the workers.....or prostitutes -- it's in the same ball park -- it's the making of a profit off the exploitation of another person. We live in a materialistic world, and what we do has to do with our drive and desire to get. And we think we can buy our way into happiness.

If you look at the ads that appear in television or on the radio or in magazines, every one of them is designed to awakening desire so that someone can turn a profit by satisfying a stimulated need.

But coveting can appear in a more subtle way. How about that desire for status and place, the kind of drive that can lead one to be jealous, envious, gaining the things that are in, are signs that a person has arrived. What are the status symbols of our day? What are the things that you really crave? -- so

that you can show folks that you've climbed to the top of the ladder of success?

Or how about the form of coveting that's the coveting of people? The Commandment very specifically forbids the coveting of your neighbor's mate, but what about friendship, and the way people play one person off against the other? You know there are some people who can't stand to see their best friend spend time with somebody else.

So deep down inside all of us is that idea that if we can get, that if we possess, and if we have, then we'll be happy. The feeling in the heart and the mind is that 'if I had this, and if I had that, I'd be satisfied.' But it's true, isn't it, that once we get what we want, and the brief thrill is over, that we lose interest. Like the young child with a new toy -- for an hour or two or a day or two he's fascinated with it, and it's tossed aside and he's standing at the store window, wanting something else. There's the desire, like the rhythm of hunger and thirst, the satisfying of a desire, and then the rise of the desire again. And it's for that reason that the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus laid down this prescription -- he said, "If you want to make a man happy, add not to his possessions. If you want to make a man happy, take away his desires." In other words, a person can't be satisfied by acquiring things, but the cure for coveting is learning to be content.

They tell a story about an old king who was dying of melancholy. And after he had tried all the doctors and the wise men in vain, he was told that if he could get the shirt of a perfectly happy man and wear it, then he, too, would be happy. And so there was the search for the perfectly happy man...and they found him -- a traveler, walking along the road, a man of little means, without a shirt on his back. If the possession of things brought contentment, then this ought to be the happiest age in the history of the world, for never has our civilization had so much of the things which were once the possession of the privileged few and are within the reach of so many.

And yet it's also true, isn't it, this age in history is the most neurotic and dissatisfied, and that it seems that the mark of an affluent society is unrest, and unease.....that sooner or later we discover that contentment is not to be found in the possession of things.

So then where is contentment to be found and how might we go about dealing with this business of coveting? In Shakespeare's Henry VI, the King is asked the question: "But if thou be King, where is thy crown?" The King answers, "My crown is in my heart, not on my head, not decked with diamonds and Indian stones nor to be seen. My crown is called content!" A crown it is that seldom kings enjoy.

In the first case, any situation that causes someone to lose their self-respect cannot produce happiness. In the second case, any forbidden relationship which is the cause of tragedy for others cannot produce happiness. In the third case, any situation that causes a person to be separated from God cannot produce happiness. One sure way of being unhappy is always to desire what other people have. The Christian is meant to be content and recognize the place for things in this world, that there are some things he will never have, there are some things that once he does have them, will never bring happiness if he keeps them to himself. It's what a person does with what he has that determines his character, and happy indeed is the person who recognizes that he can't take it with him, and so lives life with the intent of being content and to share what he has.

Dane Gordon is the author of a play called "Too Little For Milo"...and there's a point in the play where the dialogue unfolds, when the teenager daughter who becomes upset with some of the actions of her parents confronts her father and puts to him a question in a very pointed way, as only a teenager can. She asks her father, "What is it that you really want in life?"

...and the father tells his daughter, "I want to be the

best of my kind in my business."

...and the daughter asks him, "Then what?" . . . and he said, "We want to make a fortune!"

...and the daughter replies, "Then what?" . . . "Well, we want to travel a little."

..."And then what?" . . . "We want to be sure to be able to put you through school."

..."And then what?" . . . "Well, we want to build a summer place."

..."Then what?" . . . "We want to retire and be able to do some of the things we've never been able to do."

..."Then what?" . . . and with an exasperated sigh, the father replies, "Well then, I guess we'll die."

...and the daughter asks, "Then what?"

And wasn't it Jesus who told the story about the man who had such a craving and desire for things that he amassed all the possessions and put them in his barn, only to lose his own soul?

I don't know how it is with you when you've kind of tried to take stock of yourself in light of the Commandments, but when it comes to these that have to do with coveting, I wonder how I would react if I'd find myself in a situation like the story that was told to my father by Mae Troxler -- about the man who went to his neighbor and he said, "You see that new car out there in front of my house -- my brother gave me that!" And you know what the neighbor said? -- "I wish I could be a brother like that."

...now you think about that.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"ALL ABOUT MATTHEW"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Matthew 9:9

Today's sermon is based upon the Gospel Lesson, and the text is the first verse that you heard read. By deliberate design let me read it for you again, and let me read it for you twice -- not once, but twice....the first reading:

"As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a
man called Matthew sitting at the tax
office, and He said to him, Follow me,
and he arose and followed Him . . ."

....that's the first reading.

Now hear it for the second time:

"As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a
man called Matthew sitting at the tax
office, and He said to him, Follow me,
and he arose and followed Him . . ."

Now honestly, tell me, do you really believe that it happened just like that? Again and ever so often as you read the Bible you come across a certain passage or incident, and you have a way of saying to yourself, I don't think it happened just like that! Just, interestingly enough, when Matthew remembers how he was called as a disciple, that's the way he put it down....and also when Luke in his record told about the call of Matthew, he put it down in the same manner....and Mark does the same thing. All three of them record it just like that.

Well, maybe it did. Quite frankly, I'm not so sure. I think there was much more to it than that, and I'll tell you why I believe there was much more to it than that. For Matthew being the kind of man that he was, just wasn't someone to give in by an emotional reaction to somebody who looked at him

and gave him a beckoning glance. To all intents and purposes, Matthew was a man of the world, he was a realist. He knew exactly what he was doing. That's how he got his job.

Now for the moment let me tell you about this man and his job. You can tell a great deal about a man's character by the kind of job that claims his energy and his talent. Matthew -- or Levi, call him either one -- was a tax collector. It was not a very honorable occupation, at least as far as the Jews were concerned. You've heard me tell you this before. The Romans were the occupying authorities. They had certain revenue that they wanted exacted from the land of the people, and so they would employ on their staff certain Jews, and they would say to them, "This is the amount of revenue that we want from your territory - - now how you get it is up to you, you can determine your own schedule"

....imagine having to deal with a tax collector who determined his own rate -- how he could exploit the situation, and that's exactly what Matthew and his kind did!

Now, that's the kind of person Matthew was. And because he was that kind of person he was not held in good grace by his fellow Jews. They looked upon him, and quite understandably so, as a traitor, as someone who was turning his back upon his fellow men.

Not only that, it wasn't just the way he conducted his business, but every now and then you'd find a devout Jew who had a high regard for the Sabbath.....well, Matthew didn't have much of a regard for the Sabbath.

- - and you'd find a devout Jew who had a high and holy regard for the keeping of the law.....Matthew and his kind didn't pay much attention to keeping the law. Now have I given you the picture of a rather disgraceful

character, one who was not attractive to his fellow Jews? That's the kind of a picture I want to give you, because I have reason to believe that that's the kind of man he was.....and then one day Jesus comes along, and Jesus looks at this man and He says, "Follow me" - - and Matthew gets up, puts his money in the drawer, closes his books, never again returns to the seat of custom.....and becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ.

I have my moments when I think somebody may have said to someone, "This man Jesus -- what's he really like?" Now why don't you ask yourself the question. Forget about the stained-glass image that you have of Jesus Christ, forget about the image that you have of Jesus Christ as He's carved into stone or wood.....forget about this Lord and Saviour of ours who wears a halo. But suppose you lived in His time, and the only thing you knew about Him was that He was the son of a carpenter who went around preaching - - and as a result, people's lives began to change for the better. Now, that's all you know about Him. And so you put the question to somebody who knows Him, and you say, "What's He really like?"

Now you know how some people answer a question when you put it to them that way -- they give you some bit of information with which they are familiar, as to describe out of that situation what the person's character is really like. And so when this question is put, this person answers in this manner:

"Well I'll tell you what Jesus is like . . . there was this man Matthew -- a disgraceful character -- not held in high regard by his fellow citizens, and having a rather despicable position. And one day, mind you, this man Jesus came to where he was and looked at him, and spoke two words: 'Follow me.' And mind you, this Matthew got up from where he was, and followed Jesus Christ. Now if you want to ask me what kind of a person Jesus is, this is my answer - - He could get a man

like Matthew up and on his feet, and get him to be a disciple!"

Well now there's more there than meets the eye. You have to deal below the surface. You've got to recognize what I think I can honestly tell you -- that Matthew wasn't happy being the kind of person that he was. I don't know that I have ever really met any person who was despicable who thoroughly enjoyed being despicable. I know you and I say facetiously sometimes that we enjoy misery. But I don't know that I've ever met anyone who was a real hellion who thoroughly enjoyed every step that he took on the road to Hell. Now they may not tell us that, they may wear a mask, they may shield us from what they really feel. But let's go back to what I said earlier: Matthew happened to have been the kind of person that he was, not in a very honorable position, and not held in high regard and esteem by the people with whom he had to associate. Oh, he had money, he had a job. But down deep inside we have reason to believe that Matthew wasn't very happy with the kind of person that he was. You've got to begin at that point.

You've also got to recognize that as far as the rest of us are concerned, we're quite content to gather up our skirts and move away from them. When they're not attractive to us, we enjoy keeping our distance. We're impatient with them, we're disgusted with them. After all, we're decent....and after all, we're honorable. And after all, we're trying to be good. But these people -- out there -- they're not with us. They're not one of us. And the damnable thing is that some of us don't much care!

But Jesus Christ did. He paid attention to Matthew. He didn't wipe him off the road. He recognized the potential. And as I survey the contemporary scene today, I see the world being filled with people, increasingly so, with people who are not unusual -- they're out there -- they are pagans. But they're not content. They may not tell us, but we don't even pay enough attention to

find it out. But Jesus did. And because He did, Matthew began to blossom. Maybe for the first time in his life he encountered somebody who realized that he was not what he should have been and gave him the promise of what he could become.

Some of us have lived long enough to know how our lives have been altered for the better because we have met certain people who have opened the windows into a whole new, brighter and better world for us, who were not content to allow us to be as we were. When you think of Matthew and his encounter with Jesus Christ, see him in that light, I beg you.

John Masefield's everlasting mercy is a poem in which he pictures the village sot, having his moments of sublime longing, when he fain would break away if he could. And after his conversion he confesses it:

"I wondered then what life might be,
And what would be the end of me,
When youth and health and strength were gone,
And cold old age came creeping on;
And looking around, I felt disgust
Of all the nights of drink and lust,
And all the looks of all the swine,
Who said they were the friends of mine."

There's one parting thought, if you don't mind. I think somewhere along the line, in the days of his youth perhaps, there were those who had made an impression upon Matthew, or Levi, and had given him to understand that life was worth living, and worth living according to God's plan. But somewhere along the line Matthew, or Levi, got away from it. Now this reminds me of two things.

First, you and I must never short-change the necessity of impressing young people with the integrity of the spiritual values that mean so much to us. There may be years when they will get away from them, but the fact remains - - in the impressionable years you and I are in duty bound to impress upon the fabric of their souls the meaning of spiritual truths.

And the second thought - - I honestly believe that sooner or later a person has a way of getting back to the things that really matter most. No man who strays for any distance on the wrong road ought to be consigned to Hell forever. Even God doesn't do that. Matthew may have been temporarily side-tracked, but there came that malleable moment, that psychological second when Jesus Christ challenged him....and that made all the difference in the world.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"GOOD ADVICE"

GRACE, Mercy and peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Romans 12:3

The text is from the 12th chapter of the letter that Paul wrote to the Christians who lived in Rome, it's the third verse:

"As your spiritual teacher, I by the grace of God given me, give this advice to each one of you: don't cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or your importance, but try to have a sane estimate of yourself and of your capabilities by the light of the faith that God has given to you all . . ."

...that's a bit of advice.

Now you ought to recognize at the very beginning that Paul did not hesitate to give advice. It becomes the Christian to give advice and counsel. Sometimes you and I shy away from this sort of thing. We're not so sure how it will be received, and we place a high value on the friendships that we enjoy with some people, and we're convinced at times that if we do say something to them, we run the risk of offending them, of alienating them, and we don't want that to happen.

But this man, the Apostle Paul, had gotten around quite a bit, and established more than one congregation, as you well know. But he never allowed himself to have a detached attitude towards the people for whom God had given him a measure of responsibility. And when something was brought to his attention to which he felt he had to speak, he didn't hesitate to do it. So let me say again as strongly as I can, it does become the Christian to give advice and wise counsel.

You should also recognize that when Paul gave that advice, he recognized

why he was doing it. It was because of the goodness of God, it was because of what God had done for him, that he felt constrained to pass it on to somebody else. So when you begin to give advice, my friend, here's a word of caution -- recognize your standing in the sight of God before you begin to speak to somebody else. He talks about the grace which God had given to him -- he saw himself as the recipient of God's favor. Goodness had come into his life, and because of this he felt in duty bound to share it with somebody else.

I am not certain that God ever gives anything to you or to me that has my name or your name on it alone. Whatever God gives, He gives in order that we might share with somebody else. And if you and I have learned something along the way, we are in duty bound, then, to allow others to benefit by our experience. So Paul without any hesitation says: "I'm going to give you some advice."

The second thing that you need to notice in this text is that the advice that he was about to give, he said, "I'm going to give it to every one of you." He wasn't selective. He didn't say, "What I'm about to say applies to every third person, every tenth person . . . "....he didn't say, "I'm going to give this advice to those of you who need it more than others." He said, "What I'm about to say can be applicable to every single person."

Preachers need to remind themselves of that when they go to the sacred desk. People make a mistake sometimes when they think that the preacher is aiming at this person or that person, and always the other person. If a preacher is worth his salt, when he goes to the sacred desk and begins to preach what he's about to say by the grace of God is applicable for everybody -- every single person, beginning with himself.

Now having said that, let's look at the advice he gave....."Don't cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or your importance, but try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of the faith that God has given to you all." Now how in the world -- answer me this, will you -- how is it possible

for us to have a sane estimate of ourselves? It's not very easy. Most of us never get a true image of ourselves. Well, as far as that's concerned, we don't always get a true image of other people, either. We have a way of seeing people through the lens of our own particular prejudice, and if ever we're prejudiced in favor of someone, it's when we think of our own selves. We are usually seeing ourselves in a favored light. The Apostle Paul, ^{is}pleading now for a sane, sober, sensible self-image.

I'm going to suggest to you that usually we suffer from one of two things when we think of ourselves: we may either have an exaggerated opinion of ourselves, and suffer then from a superiority complex...or we may be crippled by just the opposite -- having an inferiority complex -- bask too much in our humility, experience too frequently a low self-image. And either one can be very damaging. How, then, is it possible to have this sane, sober, sensible estimate of myself?so each one of us ought to speak.

It could well be that a salutary thing would be for each of us to recognize that by and large he has been given more in this life than he is ever going to be able to return. Every single one of us is on the receiving line. God's been good to us. God has smiled favorably upon every single one of us. And when one begins at that point he begins as one who recognizes the grace of God. A man ought always to remember that he comes into a world that's waiting to receive him. The longer I live, the more I recognize the beauty and the strength and the glory of that thought. As for myself, before that day in May, 1915, God has raised up that woman, simple and sound of heart, with a heart as big as the world -- waiting to cradle in her arms a child. Each of us is born into a world with arms outstretched in welcome. What have we that we have not received? You begin at that point, my friend.

You begin at the point of recognizing the fact that you're someone who is an object of love. One of the great moments in our liturgy as we gather together

as Lutherans in the worship service is when the officiating minister can address all of you with the same expression: Beloved in the Lord! One has a sane, sober estimate of himself when he realizes that he's not orphaned in this universe. He has a Heavenly Father who cares for him, and who loves him, and who sees that his needs are met. And if that's not enough to give a person a sane, sober and sensible estimate of himself, I don't know what is. And if I don't subscribe to the Sacrament of Baptism for any other reason, I most certainly would subscribe to it because it means that I'm being welcomed into the Family of God -- I belong to a particular group of people who are surrounding me with their love. I am not alone in this world.

And then the next thought naturally follows: because I am a child of God I am important to God. And God has need of me. There is something that I can do for him . . . God does not deal in duplicates, and whatever God has in mind for you to do is enough to give you a healthy and sane estimate of your own value.

I used to think of it in this manner: that no one is hopeless who has a friend. I have a healthy image of myself when I realize that I have a friend in Jesus Christ -- there is the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who is kindly disposed toward me! And that's enough to help me to hold my head a bit high and not to be covered by the forces of evil.

No man is hopeless who has a friend...the corollary follows very quickly -- no man is useless who is one. And that's enough to give a person a sense of importance -- there is a purpose to be served in and through his life.

Well now, there's so much more to be said. But it's a perfectly beautiful day. Continue this ministry of fellowship as we go out on the church lawn and talk with one another and greet one another. And let's place upon the stamp of each other the importance that becomes a fellow believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WHEN GOD SAYS STAY"
(To Run Or Not To Run)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from
God our Father and from His
Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed
Lord. Amen.

Jeremiah 42:14

There is both a title and a sub-title for today's sermon. The title could be "When God Says Stay" and the sub-title could be: "To Run Or Not To Run" - - and the text is the 14th verse of the 42nd chapter of the Book of Jeremiah:

" . . . we will go to the land of
Egypt, where we shall not see war,
or hear the sound of the trumpet,
or be hungry for bread, and we will
dwell there . . . "

You can't possibly appreciate that text without recognizing anew the historical setting. It was a critical chapter in the life of Judea. The people now have been over-run by the Babylonians. They were being held by these people who were their oppressors, and as you might suppose, the Babylonians declared a governor for the Jews - - he was a puppet. The Jews could tolerate this only for a while, and eventually there sprang up a band of revolutionaries. They were simply waiting the time until it would be the right day or the right night and they'd assassinate the puppet governor. And that's exactly what they did.

Now having realized what had happened, they had mixed emotions. Of course they're happy - - they've gotten rid of this fellow, and they've served notice to Babylon that they will not tolerate the kind of injustices which have been inflicted upon them. Stroke One in their favor.

But this is tempered somewhat, of course, by some sober realistic reaction. They are small in number. The Babylonians could overwhelm them. How will the Babylonians retaliate? A very good question.

As I share this with you I think of the time when I went outside that old city of Prague, Czechoslovakia, traveled some distance on a Sunday afternoon to Lidice. Now Lidice was a village that was completely obliterated. The Nazis had a Commandant in that section of Bohemia -- Heydrich -- and one day as his car came around the corner some Czech partisans laid hold upon him and killed him. The Nazis retaliated. They took all the women and children in the village and carted them off to concentration camp....then they lined the men and the boys up in front of a barn and shot them -- buried their bodies in a mass grave. Then they brought in horses and plows, having burned the village, and turned the debris underground. And on the site of what once had been this delightful village of Lidice, they planted a corn field. That was their answer of retaliation.

....presumably that's the kind of thing that the Jews began to fear, as would have been paralleled in their day. So against that situation they began to panic - - what should we do?

As is their custom, they turned to a man of God whose name is Jeremiah. They had turned to Jeremiah before but they didn't always take his advice. But this time they came to Jeremiah and they said, "We have thought it through. We think we'd better get out of here. It would serve our better interest if we were to run, and we know exactly where we want to go. We want to go to Egypt. There's no trumpet being sounded down there to march us off to war - - seemingly there's no strife, no strain, no tension. The word that we get is that there's plenty of food to eat - - that's where we'll go and that's where we'll live."

...but because they were devout and revered Jahweh, they said to Jeremiah, "Now you talk it over with God -- you're God's man -- tell God this is what we've decided to do and we'd like to have God say it's all right."

So Jeremiah goes off. and Being a very wise man, he knows exactly how God is going to answer, but he doesn't give the answer at once. He waits a couple

of days, and then he waits a whole week....and then he waits a week-and-a-half. And on the tenth day he comes back. They want to know what God thinks. Jeremiah says, God says you don't go. You stay here. You don't run away!

Well, they had made up their minds that they were going to run. So down to Egypt they went, and they took Jeremiah along. Now as I understand it, things eventually turned out to be pretty much the same in Egypt as they were back in Judea. It didn't pay them to run.

This sermon is being preached for any of you who may find yourselves in a so-called intolerable situation, and where you have the inclination to get out of it, to run. Now let me tell you quite frankly, it's not a very easy sermon to preach because the sermon ought to be balanced. There are times when God did give the directive and told people to "hit the road" -- to get away from where they were. There were times when God will say that. I want you to know that.....but there are also times such as this one, when God says, "You don't hit the road. You stay where you are."

It's a bit of advice that we need to take seriously because on occasion there are many of us who allow ourselves to think, "If only we were somewhere else." After spending almost forty years in the ministry, I can still hear the monotonous chant of the litany of that parade of people who have gone across the horizon of my soul -- unhappy with their situations -- "If only . . . " "If only . . . " "If only . . . "

- - "If only I had married someone else . . . "

- - "If only I were living somewhere else . . . "

- - "If only I were doing something else . . . "

- - "If only my kids were different than they are . . . "

"If only " "If only . . . " "If only . . . " "If only . . . "

And sometimes they have come to me, hoping and praying perhaps that I might say to them, "Well, you're right. The situation would be better if only you

were somewhere else." But like as not, constrained by God I have had to say to them: "Stay where you are, and stick it out."

Now don't get me wrong, there are times when there has to be a change of environment. There are times when a person simply must get away from where he is. But when one thinks that God's primary interest in us is in the salvation of our souls and the development of our character, we may have to accept the fact that it isn't the situation in which we may find ourselves that's the important thing, it's the way we respond to the situation in which we find ourselves.

Having said all of this, I must also remind you that we don't always have the assurance that the grass is really greener somewhere else. I remember reading in some of the British periodicals that come across my desk, how at a certain period in British history, as far as England was concerned, there were people who lived in and around London who said, "We have got to get away from here - - the situation is such that it would be far better somewhere else."and a student of that scene observed that for almost every boat that headed for Australia from England, there was a boat returning from Australia to England. It just didn't work out that way.

I'll read it for you just as I found it the other day - - a farmer made up his mind to sell his farm, related J. Wallace Hamilton...

"Evidently he was disgusted with it - - if only he were somewhere else....this was wrong, that was wrong. He felt he'd be more satisfied with another farm. So he called a real estate agent to put his property on the market.

The agent prepared an advertisement for the newspaper. Before sending it in, very properly of course, he called in the farmer, and he read the advertisement to the farmer, just as it was going to appear in the newspaper.

The advertisement told of the farm's advantages -- naturally he'd write it up that way....the advertisement told of the ideal location. The realtor was interested in selling this farm. The realtor included in the advertisement that it had up-to-date equipment, that there were fertile fields, there was a well-bred stock. 'Wait a minute,' said the farmer, 'Read that again and read it slowly.' The realtor read it once again. 'I have changed my mind' the farmer replied. 'I'm not going to sell. All my life I have been looking for a place like that!'"

It's a sobering thought, of course.

Well, what does one do, however, when he finds himself in a so-called intolerable situation, permitting himself to believe if only he were somewhere else, things would be much better?

I should also tell you this, I once knew of a preacher who had a call to another congregation, and some dear soul came up to the preacher and she said to him, "Why are you going?" - - as people are inclined to say when a man is about to leave. And he answered as preachers sometimes are prone to do - - he very honestly, naively said, well, he thought that if he moved on to another place he could do a better piece of work. And the dear soul looked him straight in the eye and said, "Well, Dr. Brown, why don't you stay here and do a better piece of work?" And maybe when you and I are facing an intolerable situation and we feel that we're not doing work as effectively as we might, maybe the situation could improve if we renewed our effort and our zeal to discharge the obligation that rested upon us in a situation where we happened to be.

There are two things that need to be said before this sermon comes to a conclusion. I want to remind you that during the Lenten season we had these very delightful luncheon sessions in Bieber Hall for folks who live alone. In addition to the lunch we had meaningful conversation. It wasn't idle chatter and it

didn't deal with trivia. But we did deal with the things that are really important in the lives of people, and one Thursday when we were together we were talking about "How does one face the inevitable when it's not tolerable?" And as I looked around the room I was hoping that the one who would stand up and would speak did speak -- she was in her 80's....

...having been her pastor for more than ten years, or twelve, I knew some of the untoward blows that life had given to her, and I was hoping that she would speak because I knew how she was rooted and grounded in the faith. And bless her soul, she stood up and she said two things: "Well, the first thing, you accept the situation -- you wouldn't become an emotional cripple by trying to deny it -- it is as it is, and you accept it. It simply isn't otherwise."

....Some of us can't quite do that. Some of us refuse to believe that it is as it is, or that the untoward blow should come to me.and she said something beyond that. She said, "You accept it, and then you ask God to help you to face it."

And that's exactly what Jeremiah was trying to get over to this bunch of Jews who thought they'd be far better off if they went down to Egypt. He says: "You stay here, and by the grace of God you can persevere with patience so that God's purpose can be fulfilled through you where you are."

Now every now and then that's exactly the way God's going to answer us. It may not be to our liking -- the advice that he gave those Jews was sound advice, because when they got down to Egypt it wasn't a bit better than what it was back there under the Babylonians. That's the way it happened then.

One needs to ask himself, what would have happened if Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane would have said to his Heavenly Father: "It is intolerable! Get me out of this situation -- put me somewhere else!" What, then, would have happened to God's plan for salvation for us? And that's something to think about, too . . .

* * *

(this sermon transcribed as recorded)

June 25, 1978

"AS AS THE FIRST"

~~"ON BEGINNING AGAIN"~~

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Genesis 15:4

Let me begin by telling you what you already know: most men have an eye for a pretty girl. It's been that way from the beginning of time -- it will be that way until the end of time. Interestingly enough, there's reference to that sort of thing in the Bible. Now let me tell you a little bit about it.

It has to deal with a man named Abraham, a character who had found a warm spot in God's heart. God thought so highly of Abraham that He called him to become the father of the Chosen Race. He placed a high value upon what Abraham could offer -- so in God's plan for his life He gave him Sarah. And Sarah was beautiful to behold, as lovely a lady, perhaps, as there was in the land.

And then one day Abraham and Sarah went into a strange country where, to you perhaps, strange customs prevailed. There was the custom in that day that if someone lived in the king's palace, he could claim any beauty upon whom his eye would fall. And that's exactly what happened to Abraham's Sarah -- somebody from the king's house saw her.

Abraham prepared himself against that, and he said to Sarah, "If they know that you're my wife, they'll kill me -- they can do that, just to have you!" Naturally Abraham thinks first of his own neck, and so to Sarah Abraham says, "This is what you'll do -- I'll tell them, and you'll tell them, that you're my sister."

Now that's the strange custom in that day -- they don't kill him as his sister, but they would kill him if he claimed her as his wife. The rascal that Abraham was, he was willing to sacrifice her honor to save his neck. So

while they're there in that strange country, Abraham passes her off as his sister. And as I've already indicated, someone in the king's palace had the eye for the pretty girl, and off she went.

But God is not to be tricked -- God's basic morality remains. A lie is a lie, and deceit is deceit....and trickery is trickery, no matter where or when it's performed. According to the Bible -- you can read this for yourself -- the Egyptians had to pay a price. And it occurred to the Egyptians that what they were experiencing by way of an unfortunate experience was due to Abraham's deceit. And so after a while he's expelled from the country, he's escorted to the border by a police escort.

Now what would he do? Well, let me give you the title for today's sermon: "As At The First." And the text is the 4th verse of the 13th chapter of the Book of Genesis:

"And then Abraham went to the place where he had made an altar, as at the first, and there Abraham called upon the name of the Lord."

Abraham does now exactly what he ought to do, he goes back and begins all over again.

By this time you know I make it a habit of reading the Bible occasionally from cover to cover. I begin with Genesis and go all the way through to Revelation, as many of you do. I said to myself the last time I did this: now if you were to write down on a piece of paper the twin truths which are readily in the Bible from cover to cover, what are they?

The first basic truth is this: that man is a sinner. He's always doing something that he ought not to be doing -- defrauding his brother or disobeying God. He is by nature a sinful person. And evidence of that comes up again and ever so often. That's one of the things I'd write down at the bottom of the page.

The other bottom line would be this: that God's character remains the same 2-

He is essentially good and merciful -- powerful, of course -- majestic -- no question about that! -- omniscient -- seeing everything -- of course. But the bottom line remains. He is a good God, and a compassionate God. These are the twin truths of the Bible. So now, Abraham having done what he did, is given a chance by God to begin all over again. And that's the exceedingly precious truth that's inherent in this text.

Now, if you don't mind, let me share with you two observations. Why did this man Abraham, chosen by God, do this unsavory thing? Why did he have this lapse?

I'm going to suggest one reason: he was in strange country. He was no longer at home. If life has taught me anything, it's also taught me that it's easier for people to be bad when they're away from people who for a number of reasons provide them restraining influences. At the last service I happened to notice in the congregation a precious young woman who was in the last Confirmation Class that I had in Messiah's Church in South Williamsport...and when I looked at her, of course my mind went back to my relationship in that community -- how you could walk down one street and go from one end of town to the other end, and by the time you finished, make a hundred pastoral calls just in that street alone....and you would know the people who lived there. Perhaps in this house is where this family lived, and then down in the same block, across the street, is where the grandparents lived....and then maybe at the other end of town is where the cousins lived. They were all a part of that community, and when they came to church -- the children, the parents and the grandparents and the cousins, the aunts and the uncles....

Well we live in a highly mobile society now, as you are well aware, and the farther we get away from those who have taught us what we ought to believe, and who have helped to fashion our character, it becomes an easy

thing sometimes to forget. The farther some people get away from the preacher -- the farther some people get away from the Sunday School teacher -- the farther some people get away from their parents - - - the easier it is to let down the barriers, to go astray on the wrong road. It's simply a fact of life.

And I'm inclined to think that that's the way it was with Abraham in a strange country, far away from home. So he permitted himself this lapse.

I'm going to suggest a second thing: you may make of it what you wish -- I have an idea that when Abraham did this he was a middle-aged man. And there's always the peril of middle-age. For people who are growing and emerging, characterwise-wise, they may in their younger years have restraining influences at work, and also an earnest desire on their part to be as good as their teachers want them to be. And so for a certain period in our lives we may strive after perfection (that's a figure of speech, of course).....but then when middle-age comes, there is always the possibility that we could throw ourselves into neutral. We have been good for a certain reasonable period of time, and maybe now we can become good just automatically. But I'm not so sure that there's any kind of goodness that happens just automatically. And this is always the peril of middle-age.....

...and then always there may be the inclination to think, well,

I have been good, and if I allow myself some indiscretion now, maybe later on I'll have enough time to repent and make up for it....so one may rationalize....

But be that as it may, I'm inclined to think that Abraham was a middle-aged man when he allowed this unsavory chapter in his life to be written.

The longer I am in the ministry the more I realize the necessity to pay attention to people of all ages within any parish situation. Some time ago, both of your pastors were given a very attractive call to another congregation. Part of the appeal was this: "We've just finished the new Sunday School building,

and we've dedicated it debt-free - - now, you come and provide us the necessary leadership! One of you can concentrate on children and youth, and the other of you can concentrate on people sixty years of age and older." So they had figured it out -- "these are the areas of our concern."

But upon reflection it occurred to me, what about people in middle-age? They, too, need a ministry, they, too, need to have their faith shored up, and to be made constantly sensitive to the spiritual values which cannot be ignored at any age.

I should like to believe that part of the strength that we experience here in Saint Luke is that we do not fail in God's sight an obligation to minister to people within the spectrum, at whatever level it may be.

So I say, maybe it was for Abraham the peril of middle-age -- allowing one's self to slacken a bit and to relax and to think that he had it made. But what was one of those lines when I went to see Tent Troupe on Friday night at Camp Nawakwa? - - as the play develops and the pursuers come after Keno, trying to kill him or to get the pearl - - doesn't one of the characters say from the side: "The Devil's men never rest!" - - well, the text says: "Abraham goes back to the place where he had made his original commitment, and began all over again."

And this is the wonderful news of the Christian Gospel: God is always saying to us: "You can begin again! You can begin again!" I don't know how you appraise our coming together every Sunday, but let me evaluate it for you in this way. It's God saying to us as any new week begins, whatever the week was -- "Today begin all over again, allow yourself to become re-oriented." Place that kind of value on our coming together, won't you?

I think we ought to write into the calendar of the Church an annual Sunday when all of us who are here go back and read the vows that were made at the time of our baptism, when we were named for Jesus Christ, either the promises

that we made as parents and sponsors or the promises that were made in our behalf. Martin Luther used to say during a difficult period in his life he kept his sanity by reminding himself daily: "I am baptized -- I am God's child!" We're fortunate in Saint Luke -- a significant number of our confirmands never lose touch with the church. And what a salutary thing it is to believe that when they come back each Lord's Day, if they allow themselves, they can have that recollection that when they stood in the shadow of the altar and made a promise 'with their whole heart to serve Jesus Christ'....

....June used to be the month for weddings -- maybe we ought to write into the calendar of the Church one Sunday in June when the marriage service is read from beginning to end, and we remind ourselves of promises that we made -- "for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, for better, for worse, until death separates us . . . "

To any of you who might be here right now, that within the last week, the last month, the last six weeks you have been tempted to go far on the wrong road, I've good news for you, my friend. Begin again! It's possible! God is always giving us that chance.

* * * *

(this sermon transcribed as recorded)

We give thanks to God this night for a person who was a cut above the ordinary. He was no mediocre person. He despised mediocrity. He was always setting his affection upon something better. He wanted to be a better person. Was it Dwight L. Moody, or was it Henry Drummond who is supposed to have said, "The world has yet to see a man totally committed to Jesus Christ, and by the grace of God I would like to be that kind of person." Whether Luther Wallace Youngdahl ever said that in so many words or not, those of us who were privileged to walk within the shadow of this good man could believe that he wanted to be a better person. He despised mediocrity, no matter how high-grade the mediocrity may be.

You cannot think of Luther Wallace Youngdahl without thinking of promises that were made in connection with his life . . .

-- he was born in the month of May, near the end of the month. Before the next month had passed, John and Elizabeth Youngdahl carried him in their arms, and that mother standing within the shadow of a godly man, a pastor of the church, cradled the baby Luther affectionately in her arms. And when the good man of God asked: "How shall this child be named?" -- surely his soul must have been stirred when the answer was given: "He shall be called Luther." And at that moment John and Elizabeth Youngdahl made promises that they would bring that child up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord, bring him to the services in God's House and see that he would be taught to fear God and to serve Him . . .

-- The baby grew. At fourteen years of age he made a promise for himself. You can't divorce the man from the promise...and when he was confirmed in the Christian faith in June, fourteen years after he was born, the confirming pastor might well have said to him: "Do you love the Lord Jesus and do you promise to serve Him through His Holy Church?" . . . and the fourteen-year-old made a promise with words such as these: "Yes, with my whole heart!"

-- Wasn't it at twenty-seven years of age when the man stands alongside of the woman who claimed his heart: " - - will you love her -- in sickness and in health, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, until death separates you?" . . . you can't separate the man from the promise. He made the promise, and he kept the promise.

You can write for yourself chapter and verse in the life of that man, when again and ever so often he was asked to make a promise, in behalf of a government that honored him again and again: "Will you be found faithful?"

...you can hear the ringing of the words: "Yes,
by the help of God."

You will notice in the folder that you have in your hands that there is no reference made whatsoever to the fact that he was three times Governor of the great state of Minnesota. There is no reference made to any high honor that was ever given to him, or to any achievement that he experienced. It's simply:"SAINT LUKE CHURCH marks the passing from the Church Militant into the Church Triumphant of Luther Wallace Youngdahl."

...that's the way he came to us...that's the way
he walked the sacred aisle.....that's the way he waited as
the Word was being preached.....that's the way he approached
the altar to receive the Sacrament - - as someone, as a child
of God, who had made a promise.

It's no small thing that this is the year, the year of his completion of his earthly pilgrimage -- the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the birth of Sir Thomas More. Some of you will readily recognize that in Robert Bolt's "A Man For All Seasons" More says to his daughter, "When a man takes an oath, when a man takes an oath, Meg, he's holding his own self in his own hands, like water, and if he opens his fingers, then he needn't hope to find himself again."

You can't separate the man from the promise -- like Robert Frost's man -- there was a road to travel, and the night was settling in, but there were promises to keep. And so he kept those promises.

As his Pastor I was privileged to be with him not long before he breathed his last. And what were the words that I heard? -- words of gratitude to a Heavenly Father who had watched over him...the acknowledgment of the mercies of a God who had kept His promises in his behalf.

Here is Samuel Willard of the 17th century, giving the funeral sermon at the death of Thomas Savage, one of the builders of New England -- words that we do well to heed right now: "For we remember -- he's been translated into God's nearer presence. When the pillars are gone, how shall the building stand? When the watchmen are asleep, who shall descry and warn us of the enemy's approach? When the wall is plucked down and the hedge removed, who shall keep out the boor of the wilderness? When the gap men are taken away, who shall stand in the breaches? When the lights are put out, who shall direct me in the right path? When the chariot and the horseman of Israel are removed, who shall defend us from misery and mischief?"

....Luther Wallace Youngdahl would have been the first to stand up and say: "I will bridge that gap -- I will give the warning cry -- I will blow the certain note for the trumpet!"

It was written, Irene, on February 21, 1978. He'd spoken of appreciation for what the two of you had shared as you worshipped God in this place. And then he sent this token to me. "One day is all we have. This is the beginning of a new day. God has given me this day to use it as I will. I can waste it, or use it for good. But what I do today is important because I'm exchanging a day of my life for it. When tomorrow comes, this day will be gone forever, leaving in its place something that I have traded for it. I want it to be gain, and not loss -- good, and not evil -- success, and not failure."

Do you notice how the measure of the man comes through in the readings that meant so much to his soul? No settler for mediocrity, no matter how high-grade - - - "I want it to be gain, and not loss -- good, and not evil -- success, and not failure, in order that I shall not regret the price that I have paid for it. This day is all we have. If there is someone to whom an act of kindness -- not tomorrow but today -- could make a world of difference. -- today, whether we spend it well or throw it away, will be gone tomorrow. What is there to do that is worth our effort?

It was on Christmas Day a year ago . . . tired, weak, in a hospital room, he was visited by a young lad, maybe 10, 11 years of age. Luther Wallace Youngdahl could have had many things to occupy his mind, but the very next day he asked his secretary to come, and as an act of kindness, a cut above the ordinary, he wrote that impressionable youngster a letter. That youngster is here tonight, and no one feels more deeply, perhaps, as a child, as a youngster, what it is to have cast upon him the lengthened shadow of a good man, a man who made a promise....and kept it.

* * *

(transcribed as recorded)

"DECLARATION OF DEPENDENCE"

QUIET OUR MINDS and hush our hearts,
O God, and make us ready to give some
attention to this interpretation of
Your Truth. Through Jesus Christ, Thy
Sin, our Lord, who when He came, came
preaching. Amen.

Psalm 127:1

The title for this sermon being preached on the Sunday nearest the national holiday is "Declaration of Dependence" and the text is the first verse of Psalm 127:

"Except the Lord build the house, they
labor in vain who build it."

Let it be said at once that God has made man a dependent creature. God may allow certain responsibilities to be thrust upon the shoulders of a man, but God never made any man big enough to handle those responsibilities by himself. Man is by nature a dependent person.

By the very same token, nations are meant to be dependent upon God. No matter how you may figure it, whether a nation is made up of God-fearing people or not, we are all in the hand of God. As the Scandinavian theologian said -- "We're all in the hand of God, whether with our belief or our unbelief." And God holds all peoples responsible for the way they govern and for what they do with the opportunities given to them to work for the betterment of mankind.

I did not misspeak myself -- the title is a correct one as you heard it: "Declaration of Dependence." As we think of July 4, usually we think, and properly so, of the Declaration of Independence. But a little-known truth is this: that when the colonies banded together they may have allowed themselves to believe that now they were on the path of independence. But that giant step forward was taken only when they first recognized themselves as

dependent upon Almighty God.

I am justified in telling you that as I bring to your attention that it was back there in July in the State House in Philadelphia in the year seventeen hundred seventy-six when the delegates from the thirteen colonies had come together. You can well imagine, and correctly so, my friend, that they were in dire straits. How could these people begin to think together? Each one brought the vantage-point of his own particular interest -- thirteen disparate groups. They were making very, very little headway, in fact they were making no headway at all, when according to the historian, the eyes were turned upon an old manand how comforting it must have been to him to realize that he wasn't being shelved, that at least there were still some who paid attention to him, despite his age. To the contrary, I say, there were those who paid attention to him because of his age. And that's one reason why God allows some people to grow old, on the basis of their experience they can be properly respected.....on the basis of their integrity and their experience they can well afford to be listened to. And so there are those who turned to an old man, Benjamin Franklin, and suggested that perhaps he might be willing to give them the benefit of his opinion.

Reluctantly and rather slowly he stood up....and then he made some reference -- he did know the Scriptures, you know -- you are aware of that, aren't you? He made some reference to Psalm 127. The very first verse that I read for you is the basis for this sermon this morning -- something about "Unless God builds the house, the people who build the house labor in vain." And that inspired the old man, and these are his recorded words -- we are fortunate to have them - - Ben Franklin said, "I have lived a long time, and the longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs the affairs of men, and if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His will, is it possible for an empire to rise without His notice? We have been assured in the

Sacred Writings that except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. I firmly believe this. And I also believe that without His concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel."

.....and having said that, we're told that Ben Franklin suggested that they pray, giving proof positive that they are dependent creatures and that a newly found nation must see itself as dependent upon Almighty God.....

So you recognize, don't you, that the day that was marked as the Declaration of Independence had a crowning glory -- it was the day on which they established their dependence upon Almighty God.

I'm going to suggest to you that that might not have happened if one man had not stood up and spoken the way he did. Had he not spoken that way, who knows how the tide might not have been turned? Benjamin Franklin assumed the role of leader in that critical moment. You know very well, of course you do, that as our leaders go, so our nations go. None of us here this morning may have much to do with the decision-making processes in the higher echelons -- we are dependent upon them to act in our behalf. This sermon this morning has a simple thrust, asking you to be mindful of our concern for those who represent us. They are the pivotal ones who help turn the tide. How often do you pray for them?...how often do you ask God that they should be found faithful?...how often do you ask God that they might recognize the fact that there is no wisdom except the wisdom which God provides? Oh, let there be no mistake about it -- we're aware that they are our leaders, alright, because we're so quick to criticize, we're so quick to find fault with them, we're so quick to blame them when things go wrong.....but by the same token I ask you: do you not, therefore, realize the necessity to pray for them? -- that they might be equal to the

demands that are made upon them?

Did you pray for the President of the United States this morning in your personal devotions? It's not enough for you to be satisfied and thank God that he carries a Bible in his hand and walks off to church, and on occasion will teach a Bible class -- it's not enough to feel good because that does happen. God didn't make any man big enough to handle the responsibility thrust upon him by himself and by himself alone.

-- did you pray for the Governor of this state? or your state, if you're here as a visitor or as a friend.....?

-- have you prayed for the two United States Senators from this state? (if you live in Maryland) -- have you prayed for our representatives in Congress -- can you name them?

This is the point at which we have to begin. We have to ask that they be made sensitive to God's will, and they are at the point where decisions are made that affect us and the generation yet to come.

We had a thrilling service on Wednesday of this past week. Many of you who are here now happened to have been present on that night when we marked the passing from the Church Militant into the Church Triumphant of Luther Wallace Youngdahl, three times Governor of Minnesota, and a Federal Judge. He proved the point that it is absolutely possible for a man as a Christian to remain a Christian in the political arena. How was that possible for him? Well to begin with, he was a Christian, and he realized that his calling that took him into politics is to be recognized with the same degree of fervency as the kind of calling that would have taken him into the ministry. Martin Luther was absolutely right when he said, "Even the cobbler who repairs shoes and does a decent job does something as acceptable in the sight of God as the priest who stands with folded hands before the altar in prayer." So Luther Wallace Youngdahl realized that no matter where God would lead him, he would be faithful to Jesus

Christ.

You remember the papers made much of it -- the editorials, the news releases, the obituary column - - they made reference to the fact that there was that difficult moment when he was on the bench....and there were even those who said he should step aside. But he had enough faith in his own integrity and his commitment to Jesus Christ that he said, "I simply bowed my head and made a prayer, and then went head-on." How do you get a man like that? It just doesn't happen.....

-- at fourteen years of age he committed himself to Jesus Christ. He was fortunate enough to be surrounded by those who loved him and who prayed for him. I wish I could reveal to you my personal file that I have kept of letters that he wrote ever since he became a member of this congregation, the appreciation that he spoke for the kind of thing that he experienced here when he worshipped with you.

Little did you realize how you were contributing to a man's integrity and to his earnest desire to acquit himself in the sight of God. No man shoulders responsibilities by himself.

I used to say that if I didn't belong to the Christian church for any other reason, I'd want to belong because I knew I was part of a Family, surrounded by people who would uphold me and pray for me.

When I first came into this area, our friend Bill Theis, who spent so many valuable years on Capitol Hill with the great and the near-great, walking with the presidents and the representatives of great nations of other parts of the world - - one day when we were talking about some of our representatives in Congress, their eccentricities, their idiosyncracies, their flamboyant behaviorand, to the contrary, their quiet, dignified manner. And he made an ob-

servation that others have made as well: "To a large degree they represent the constituencies that sent them there." Just as the leader casts his lengthened shadow upon the people he represents, so the people who sent that man to Congress cast their shadow upon that man as well.

To all intents and purposes, our leaders become what we want them to be. So this sermon has a simple thrust: on this day when we celebrate the birth of our nation, while we may not be in the position of making the decisions - - pray for those who are in those positions - - ask God to give them the measure of wisdom that they need, that they may discharge it faithfully and well. This I most certainly believe.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Ceremonial Cornerstone-Laying for the Enlarged Facility
Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

July 9, 1978

"LIVING STONES - LINKED TOGETHER"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

I Peter 2:5

The folder that you have in your hands designates this day as a festival in which we ceremonially lay a cornerstone. That means, of course, that your mind automatically will go to think in terms of brick, mortar, stone or stones. And before the service is concluded today we'll be marching to the site of the construction where we will visualize as best we can a completed edifice. And there again we will be thinking in terms of brick, mortar and stones.

But I suggest to you that you will do yourself a disservice if this is all that you contemplate today. I should be very happy indeed if while we are outside and laying the cornerstone, people, non-members of the parish, might pass by and take a look at what's going on. Chances are they will not see the girders that are being erected upward.....chances are because of the flow of the people, they won't see the poured concrete floor -- they'll hardly see the outline of the building at all. But what they will see will be you. And that's exactly as it ought to be.

For this is a day in which we think not only of brick and mortar and stone and stones . . . this is the day when we think in terms of living stones.

Perhaps you'll better understand when I put it for you this way - - I would be less than honest if I did not tell you that since I came to you in 1956 I have had certain days that have been hard, certain days that have been difficult. But I have never known complete despair. I have always known a measure of joy in being related to you, the people of this parish. But I've built in for myself an antidote against despair, if I should need it: I

would mark, without any hesitation, the path that leads to the Chapel of the Grateful Heart.....I would mark the path that leads to this place, and here, as I have been wont to do on occasion, I would sit quietly and I would be enveloped by you, the people of this parish, whose commitment to Jesus Christ is enough to constitute a boon to any man's spirits.

And then if that were not enough, this also I would do as an antidote to despair: I would walk outside the red doors, and then I would turn immediately to the right, and I would focus my eye upon a cornerstone.....

.....and then in addition to that I would come around to this side of the building, and I'd focus my eye upon the cornerstone of the Christian Education Building - - - this would be my built-in antidote against despair....

And I most certainly would take heart as I would remember the founding fathers of this congregation....

...I would think of the Mission Developer, Milton J. Bieber -- I wouldn't simply see a stone -- I'd see a living stone, a personality, a vital one at that.....

...I would think in terms of the first parish pastor of Saint Luke, the Rev. Mr. Frederick Eckert.....

...I would think in terms of the second pastor, the Rev. Dr. Raymond Sorrick, who inspired a small number of people to build a place of worship to accommodate four times the size of their membership.....

....I would think in terms of the Church Council.....

....I would think in terms of the Building Committee, the officers of the congregation....

....those would be the faces I would see as I would look at that stone.....

And when I would look at the stone, the cornerstone for the Christian Education structure, I would think of my immediate predecessor, the Rev. Dr. Robert E. Lee, who for nine years shepherded the souls of this parish, who inspired you and led you from one level to another, and who kept telling you that it would be possible to build what had to be built....

...I would see standing alongside of him those who represented the leadership of the parish in that day....I would see the congregation of those years.....

I would not simply see a stone, but that stone would remind me of vital personalities, who were linked together as part of the Body of Christ.

And that's what you and I have to see today. We've got to get this right and proper image of ourselves as we ceremonially lay a cornerstone. The Apostle Peter had this great image of the Church: "living stones, linked together."

Yesterday, last evening, as I walked by, I picked up this brick, and as I hold it in my hand I say to myself, I'm not so sure that the brick-maker ever thought in terms of one brick and one brick alone. A brick by itself isn't very useful. There really isn't very much that you can do with one brick -- maybe a door-stop, you might think of other uses. But that isn't why bricks were manufactured. Bricks were meant to become part of a wall, part of a building. They were meant to be put together.

And by the same token, there is no such thing, properly speaking, as a solitary Christian. Once a man confesses faith in Jesus Christ he is drawn by the Holy Spirit to other Christians, so that together they can make their necessary impact and their proper thrust.

We have a figure of speech that we use repeatedly here in Saint Luke Church: the Church Militant. The Church is constantly fighting a battle against sin. But what war could be won if an individual soldier would say,

"I'm going to do battle, and I'll fight this war on my own"? He becomes part of an army, he becomes part of a collective unit, and together they wage combat. Properly speaking, the Christian Church is made up of individuals who are united, who constitute a collective effort, a corporate thrust.

There is a famous story from Sparta. The Spartan king boasted to a visiting monarch about the walls of Sparta. The visiting monarch looked around and he could see no walls at all. He said to the Spartan king, "Where are these walls about which you speak and boast so much?" The Spartan king pointed to his body-guard and the magnificent Spartan troops: "These," he said, "These are the walls of Sparta, and every man is as a brick or as a stone."

So when you think of this new addition, the enlarged facility, think not in terms of brick and mortar and stone, but of the personalities that have made this possible, the collective effort.

You ought to know that if someone would have come to us, one member of this parish, and would have said, "Here is my personal check for one million, one hundred thousand dollars -- I want to build this building" - - - you have a right to know that with whatever weight I could command, as the Senior Pastor and the President of the Congregation, I would have deliberately discouraged the acceptance of that gift. I would have said, "Thanks - but no thanks." Because properly seen, this building must be the cooperative effort of all of us. That's what makes it so significant. And that's why to the everlasting credit of those who were responsible for projecting the financial scheme, came up with that very salutary note: "Let's think from the very beginning of proposing to the people a plan whereby every single member or every single family in the congregation would find it possible to participate."

You remember what they did. They proposed such a thing, that it would be reasonable, reduced to that level that when this building goes up, some of us still have the dream that when we cross the threshold early in 1979, we might

be able to say, all of us who walk across that threshold, "This is what we have done together."

You have a right to know that the largest single contribution, I think, is \$23,000, and that was given by one person because he was encouraged by what everybody else had been doing. What he did he did as a measure of encouragement to all the rest of us. I can't tell you what the lowest figure is that's been given. But I'm reasonably certain that whoever gave it, gave it as a measure of encouragement to other people to do the same. There is no such thing as a single brick, but the wall goes up brick by brick. They are put together and then united to the cornerstone. And this, too, we must never forget. Together we are shored in and buttressed by the Chief Cornerstone which is Jesus Christ.

That's what makes this so exciting. It isn't something that's being done in the name of Saint Luke Church. It isn't something that's being done just by those who are part of this generation of membership. It's being done by those of us who are part of the Body of Christ, to His honor and glory, forever and ever.

Some day in the years to come another pastor will stand where I now stand. And if I were to pass on to him an antidote for despair, I'd say, "My friend!" -- calling back to him from wherever I may be, " - - stand by the cornerstone . . . look at it long enough, until you see faces, until you can throb with the personalities of those who said, "This we do to the honor and glory of God!"

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"NOW ABOUT JACOB - - "

O GOD, what with the pressure of so much activity, we make so little time to do this sort of thing, to give some measure of undivided attention to the interpretation of your Word. That we should make the most of the opportunity at hand, enlighten us by Your Holy Spirit. In the Name of Jesus Christ, who when He came, came preaching. Amen.

Review 32:24

I thoroughly enjoy reading all parts of the Bible. But I especially enjoy turning to certain pages in the Old Testament. For every now and then I come upon a real rascal, and in reading about a rascal there is hope for your soul and mine, because when I recognize what God has been able to do with people of that type, surely there is hope for someone such as you and me.

That's another reason why I appreciate the Good Book -- you know that, don't you? -- because the Bible tells it always exactly as it is. It has no way of covering up for its saints. Where there are sinners, they call them sinners.....when they slip and when they fall, they acknowledge that fact. But the Bible is not primarily, as you know, a book about man. The Bible is above all else a book about God -- His redeeming power -- how, thanks to the Holy Spirit, He can move a person to repentance and allow him to benefit wholly by what God Himself will give to him who calls upon the name of the Lord.

Well I told you I thoroughly enjoy reading certain parts of the Bible because every now and then I come upon a real rascal. And I want you to think with me this morning about one of those rascals. His name? His name was Jacob. And he was a rascal.

One night he was left alone, and all of his rascality came back and forth in front of him. He was an insomniac -- that is, he couldn't sleep.

...now quite parenthetically, let me tell you there are a lot of people who can't sleep at night. If I would have done the necessary research for this sermon I could give you now a statistic or so of the amount of money that's spent -- well into the millions -- just for sleeping potions, for something that you and I might be able to take that would give us a good night's sleep....

Some people can't sleep because of their life style. When I go to our little place in the country, I do what I don't get done around here -- some degree of manual labor. And I sleep the sleep of the just. It's not just because it's amid the hills-of-home, but I go to bed physically exhausted, and I'm convinced that this is part of the trouble with America -- there are not enough people who go to bed at night physically exhausted. Some people can't sleep because that may be their life style.

Some people can't sleep at night because of what they eat after supper.

Some people can't sleep at night because of what they drink before they go to bed.

But I'm absolutely convinced above all else that a good many people can't sleep at night, not because of what they eat or drink, but because of what they happen to be thinking. The proverb remains: A good conscience makes a good pillow.

Jacob couldn't sleep because of what he was thinking....thinking about his past, the kind of person he had been, a real rascal. He had become that way quite easily, I suppose. He was every bit the son of his mother. She was a contriver, a manipulator, a schemer. She's the one that taught him those dirty tricks on his brother. And now this was the night when perhaps

after two decades he was going to meet his brother again. And a lot of things were going through his mind....a parade, I dare say, again of all of his rascality. The text says, and you can read it for yourselves in the Book of Genesis, the 32nd chapter, the 24th verse:

"And Jacob was left alone."

And he didn't have very good company. He had no one on his hands but himself.

I once had a highly esteemed professor in the theological seminary who gave me his own definition for Hell -- he surprised me by his untheological definition of Hell. I muse upon it, and I think at times that while one may not be able to justify it theologically, yet there's a great deal of truth inherent in it. For my professor, Hell was a man having no one on his hands but himself. If we properly say the important letter in the word SIN is the middle letter I, then it may naturally follow that it's pure Hell when the sinner has no one on his hands but himself. Poor Jacob, there he was, in the midst of all that rascality....and there wasn't anyone to whom he could turn.

You and I do that every now and then, you know we do, when we're depressed, or when we're somewhat devastated in our loneliness, and when we're confronted by the miserable aspect of our lives we seek out the company of somebody else. That's why some people talk to bartenders -- they serve as a kind of a confessor, they listen. And every now and then, foolishly or otherwise, perhaps the bartender will say, "Well, it's not as bad as all that" -- and that's exactly what the person wants to hear! You and I sometimes go to certain people because we know that they won't tell it to us exactly as it is. They'll sugar-coat it a bit, they'll be very kind to us. They may say to themselves, "Well the person is devastated enough, I'm not going to trigger him any deeper." And they don't always do us a service when they gloss over the facts. Well poor Jacob, he couldn't even go to somebody like that! There was none to whom he could turn. And the Scriptures say:

"And Jacob was left alone."

I suppose that's one reason why people of any age hate to be alone, because they have too much time to think about themselves. As some of you know, for a good chunk of the year Winifred and I have living with us at the parsonage her 93-year old mother. She could pass for Whistler's mother, I suppose, if we kept her in a rocking chair, but she can't be seated in a chair -- she's confined to a wheel-chair all the time. She can't stand unaided. And I hope all of you appreciate the kind of time and energy that the "mistress of the manse" spends in giving to her mother. It's a very beautiful and gracious thing. But when I go home sometimes and sit in my chair, from which I can get up so easily and walk away, and when I so fitly can do so many things and I realize that she's confined there to her wheel-chair, with nothing on her hands but herself.....at 93 years of age her life is paraded back and forth in front of her. Small wonder in her case that the beauty and the radiance of a good soul is there, for she can have happy thoughts. From our human perspective she's been a good woman. And how wonderful to be able to face the sunset slope of life -- and life catches up with you and you have to sit there and you faced it . . . happy indeed is that person who can be very comfortable with all that he's been.

You and I know, of course, that in the sight of God we're all sinners and we constantly need to repent -- you know that and I know that -- but from the human perspective to know that when it's all said and done you've tried to live a good life, despite the fact that you do have feet of clay and despite the fact that time and again you've had to reach down into the dust and pick up that halo -- torn and tattered as it may be, and try to put it back in place.....and Jacob was left alone, and it was pure hell.

Oh, I'm about to suggest that maybe he had his noble intentions, he was

trying to make up his mind, he was thinking of what he was going to do tomorrow when he'd get squared off with his brother. But even there he had uncomfortable thoughts, because he knew very well that his brother knew very well the kind of person he had been -- his track record of rascality remained, and even though Jacob was trying to begin a new chapter, he wasn't sure of how he was going to be received. And that made him miserable. And Jacob was left alone. Insomniac that he was, tossing back and forth sleeplessly.

And I think it was a good thing. I've become furious at certain times when I can't sleep at night. I wouldn't embarrass myself in your presence and tell you how often I come here on a Sunday morning, wishing to God that I had had a good night's sleep, for whatever may have been the reason. But I must say to you, with all the strength that I can command, had Jacob been able to reach for a bottle of sleeping pills that night, he would have been denied something. And you and I would have been denied something. I'm glad that he had to stay awake, because he was shaken into reality, and he saw himself as he actually was: a man who had been running -- running away from other people, running away from himself.

Now that night God gave him a chance to run to Him, to run in the direction of God. And that's why God lets us have sleepless nights -- I honestly believe it -- if only to get ourselves into a position where we think about God for a change. And when Jacob allowed that to happen, he discovered a God whose arms were outstretched to receive him.....he discovered a God whose hand was strong in order to sustain him.....he discovered a God who could turn him around and make a new person out of him.

Now you and I will never discover this about God if we don't allow ourselves to be in a situation where we can give God some measure of undivided attention. And so God let us have, every now and then, a sleepless night.

And that's one reason why God, every now and then, allows us some measure of enforced idleness, and a prolonged convalescence or recovery. There are some people who never look up until they're flat on their back.

....and Jacob was left alone . . .

and found out that up until this time he had been running, alright, running away from himself and running away from other people, but in that sleepless night the net result was: he ran straight into the arms of God!

Now you think about that for a while.

* * *

(Transcribed as recorded)

"NOW ABOUT JACOB - - " (II)

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Presider 72.24

His name was Jacob. And poor chap, in more ways than one he was between a rock and a hard place.

He couldn't sleep. It wasn't as though he hadn't said his prayers -- he had said his prayers alright. But he couldn't sleep. Why? Well, there's quite a story involved, and if you don't mind, let me tell you something of it.

I am fully aware of the fact that when I last came to this sacred desk, last Lord's Day, I spoke to you about Jacob. And quite honestly, I can't get him out of my system. He keeps bobbing again and again upon the horizon of my mind.

I told you last week when I came to this sacred desk that I enjoy reading the Bible for a number of reasons, and one of them happens to be this: every now and then I come upon a real rascal -- not because I prize rascality, God forbid, but because it becomes proof positive of what God can do with a rascal. Jacob remains as one who typifies all that may be worst in human nature. He also typifies what is possible once a person responds to redeeming grace of a Heavenly Father.

I told you he couldn't sleep. There's a reason. It's quite a story.

He was a rascal from the beginning. There are those who excuse his rascality because, they say, "Look at the kind of a father and a mother that he had. His father happened to be a very retiring sort of person. I doubt if he ever raised his voice. I'm not so sure that he was much of a disciplinarian. You would have liked him -- soft-mannered, quiet -- every inch a gentleman.

...but Jacob's mother -- now that's something else. She was a

contriver, a manipulator, and a schemer. She was a strong, dominating personality. She ruled the roost -- no question about it at all! Jacob came under her influence. He allowed himself to be part of a diabolical scheme that she employed, a scheme by which his brother was to be defrauded and his father was to be deceived. They pulled it off.

And then things became so hot (I told you this is quite a story -- and you can afford to hear it) - - - things became so hot that the only thing now that Jacob could do was to 'skidoo', run away. So now he's been on the road for some two decades.

His mother, a contriver and a schemer and a manipulator, of course, to the end, suggests that when he goes, that he should go to her brother, and he should seek out his uncle who would perhaps give him some guidance and direction. Well, Jacob being a trustful soul, believes his mother and he goes to his Uncle Laban. And then he discovers, much to his regret, that Laban was every inch his mother's brother. He, too, was deceitful, he, too, could pull off a dirty trick. And he did. And Jacob didn't have a very easy time of it.....

....so there are people who excuse his rascality by saying he simply responded to the treatment to which he was exposed.

Well, be that as it may, Jacob began to pull one dirty trick after another, and got along fairly well, honestly he did. It's the story of his life -- "Dirty-Trick Jacob, the Rascal." Well now, in God's plan for his life he has decided to turn his back upon his father-in-law. He even pulls a very dirty trick at the very end, he waits until his father-in-law is out shearing the sheep, and then he gathers together his wives and his troops and his family and he leaves, to get a head start. And even though Laban comes after him, he still continues on his way.

Now he's heading home. The next day he is to see for the first time after a period of two decades his brother whom he had defrauded. In anticipation of this he prays, he turns to God. It was really quite a prayer. You can read it for yourself in that section of the chapter, the 30th, in the Book of Genesis. In that prayer he tells God how wonderful God really is...

...you ought to do that when you pray, you know that.... He even goes on in that prayer to tell God that He's been very good to him. In fact, He's been far better than he deserves. And that's quite a prayer to pray, too. First you tell God how wonderful He is, then you tell God that you don't deserve what He's given you.

And then he goes on to pray, asking that perhaps something could be done now to soften the heart of the brother whom he had defrauded, and saying if God could use His influence, now, to change the situation....that's quite a prayer!

But it wasn't very effective. And that's one reason why some of your praying and some of my praying will not be very effective, because we ourselves haven't changed much in the process. For a while Jacob, with all of his praying, remained pretty much the same person. He thought he was praying as a child of God, but really he was praying as a man of fear. And all the time he was praying he was still dealing in dirty tricks - - you can read it for yourself in the Bible. He's trying to figure out how he can outwit Esau, this very person that he wants God to change. He wants God to change him....and as much as to say to himself, in case God doesn't get through to it, I'll still have to fend for myself.....and so he figures out a scheme -- ever the schemer, you see, this man Jacob.

He's going to send one contingent of his group ahead, and they'll come bearing gifts - - ah, that ought to soften the heart of Esau....and then after

Esau has dealt with that gift, then a little time will elapse....and then another contingent will come -- ah, they'll bring gifts, too! -- that ought to soften the heart of Esau! Well, you keep repeating this sort of thing -- that ought to break him down.....

...now this is the man who has been praying, asking God to do something about it. And he doesn't seemingly trust that God's going to come through, so Jacob is going to make sure that he has some kind of strategy.

And then he realizes that maybe he won't be able to placate his brother, he may have to do war with him. Well then, what does he do in that case? -- this is his strategy also -- he'll divide his troops in two sections....he'll send one flank over there, and then in case Esau comes out to battle against that group, then the remaining section will flee for their lives and he'll still have a remnant that he can call his own. He takes care of everything. He may have prayed as a child of God, but he remained a man of fear.

And that's where your praying and my praying frequently bogs down. We never quite trust God completely. Not only that, quite honestly now, we expect God to do something about it and we expect God to see that other people will change, when the centermost thing ought to be that we ourselves ought to change. So much of our praying is trying to get God to change His mind. So much of our praying is trying to get God to change the mind-set of those with whom we have to deal. And so seldom does it occur to us that maybe the change ought to take place with us. And that's the net result, I'm happy to tell you, about this man Jacob. He typifies the worst...he was also able to personify the best. Because the final story is that he becomes a prince of God, a prince of Israel.

God wrestles with him that night -- that's the text for you:

"And Jacob was left alone, and there wrestled
a man with him until the breaking of the day . . . "

God jolted him, wrestled with him. And the net result -- a changed Jacob, a different man. And that became the prayer perfect.

Now you keep that in mind, my friend, the next time you pray. Don't spend all of your energy trying to change God and trying to change other people. Let the burden be: "Change me, O God, that I may become the effective instrument in your hand."

....it begins to make sense, doesn't it? In
the prayer perfect that Jesus taught His friends to
pray - - - "Thy will be done . . . "

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"NOW ABOUT JACOB - - " (III)

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

The question was once asked from this pulpit: Who causes you more trouble than anyone else in the world? How you reacted when that question was put, I'm not quite certain.

Some of you may have shrugged it off as being quite irrelevant.

Some of you may have taken it quite seriously, and immediately began to reflect and started naming people, the ones who cause you more trouble than anyone else in the world.....

-- that cantankerous person who will be in the office tomorrow morning . . . she's been there, or he's been there for some time -- unavoidable, inescapable -- day after day you have to return to that situation. Your life might be a breeze, so you say to yourself, if it weren't for that person....

-- or if you live next door to the Mitchells, as Mr. Wilson must do, you might think in terms of the young rascal in the neighborhood, Dennis by name, who causes you more trouble than anybody else in the world.....

Jean Paul Satre, you know, the French philosopher, said that "Hell is other people" -- if it wouldn't be for them, life would be like Heaven. But they're always getting in the way of the rest of us so-called good people.

Well, if you're inclined to give this kind of an answer to the question:

Who causes you more trouble than anybody else in the world?" -- you're really missing the mark, my friend, if that's the kind of answer that you give, for some of us have lived long enough to seriously confess -- well let me be as personal as I can -- ask me who causes me more trouble than anybody else in the world?.....my answer is: Raymond Shaheen. And that could be your answer, too, as you think of yourself. For when it's all said and done, each of us has a way of causing us a great deal of trouble. Each of us happens to be his own personal enemy.

I think that was Jacob's trouble -- I'm coming back to Jacob, if you don't mind. We dealt with him last Sunday and the Sunday before that. This could be -- I can't quite promise you - - but this could be the third and last time that we'll talk about him right now. He's that rascal who comes back and forth upon the pages of the Old Testament, particularly in that beginning book, the Book of Genesis, and in the 14th verse of the 32nd chapter of Genesis one reads:

"And Jacob was left alone, and there
wrestled a man with him until the
breaking of the day . . . "

Jacob had a rough time that night because he was left alone, and all that he had been, all that he ever was, kept parading back and forth in front of him. There are some people who are afraid to be left alone because they know what it is to have nothing on their hands but themselves. That's one reason why we're always on the go - - that's one reason why we always want to have somebody in -- that's one reason why we always have the radio on, or the television. And yet there are some of us who prize solitude....and yet there are some people who can't face solitude because they immediately experience loneliness, and the loneliness is compounded because in that encounter they deal with themselves.

Well I suppose it wouldn't be quite bad if a man had to deal with himself and with himself alone. If it weren't for the fact that he's never quite sure who his true self is. And that's the problem - - who am I? Really now -- who

am I?

We wear many faces. I'm always a bit embarrassed, but I can understand it now -- not only as a father but as a grandfather, when I compliment some set of parents upon their youngsters, and realistically they say, "Well I wish I'd see him that way -- I wish ~~xxxxxx~~ he'd be that kind of person around the house." Well, we are different.

I remember so well having read some place that somebody said, "A lawyer sees people usually at their worst....a pastor sees them at their best....and a physician sees them exactly as they are." That would be a happy thought if it were always possible to be seen exactly as we are. But we change from situation to situation and from person to person. I say this to you out of pure love, and you know that I do -- some of you right now, in this hour, in this place, sharing this bit of Heaven which is Saint Luke at worship.....may be somewhat different two hours from now, when you have to come face to face with a very bitter situation -- to which you must return. It's unavoidable, inescapable...and you will be a different kind of person two hours from now than you are right now. This could be true. We are not always the same.

When I began my ministry I began it with the lengthened shadow of the prince of the pulpit by the name of Paul Scherrer cast upon me. He was Pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Central Park West and 65th Street in Manhattan. He had a way with words. And once he was dealing with this very same text, this very same thought, and he masterfully expressed it in this way -- let me read you his words precisely:

"There are so many selves we have to face when at night we put out the light and pull up the cover. They're there in the morning, too, all sitting around the breakfast table, and getting on the subway with us, leering at us across the desk at the office, squatting down under the light at home in the evening -- everywhere we go!"

.....and then he went on to catalog them:

the old self....the anxious self....the sensitive self....the lonely self.
They're a troublesome crowd, and we've got to live with them. You and I may dream and think how wonderful it would be to be in some South Sea Island all by ourselves, away from all the cantankerous folk who get in our way, who crimp our style. And anybody who's tried it knows that he takes there himself.

"Within my earthly castle there's a crowd;
There's one of me that's humble,
There's one of me that's proud;
There's one of me that's repentant --
There's another one of me that sins,
and grins,
And thoroughly enjoys his sins."

This is the problem. Who am I?

"And Jacob was left alone and there wrestled
a man with him until the breaking of the day."

.....and when the day-break came, Jacob found his true self. It is possible.

That's one reason why some of us keep coming back to church, because within the Family of God we discover a measure of identification. That's why some of us keep saying our prayers - - because when we pray we identify with One who claims us, who never turns his back upon us, and who keeps reminding us that we're precious to him.....

"And Jacob was left alone, and there wrestled
a man with him until the breaking of the day -- "

It was God getting through to him, for Jacob now was confronted, all through that experience, with the sad ghosts of all the lives that he had lived...

- - the fellow who ran away from home because he had
deceived his father.....that's who he was, a deceiver
- the man who had also run away from home because his mother
told him the situation was no longer tolerable because
he had contrived with her to manipulate his brother --
that's who he was, deceiver...contriver...manipulator....
- - the man who went into another country, and there found

himself, before he realized it, trying to outwit a father-in-law, trying to get the better of him, because the father-in-law bested him - - that's who he was, forever on the run, running away from his father, running away from his mother, running away from his brother, running away from his father-in-law.....and now running away from himself. And he couldn't do it.

And even though he was caught up in a crowd of selves, God wrestled with him that night.

It's a figure of speech, of course it is, but as I see it for the moment it's God saying to him: "You can't run any longer, and you can't run away from me! Who are you? You're a prince - - you're meant to be a prince of Israel. I'll tell you who you are - - you are Mine. And I haven't given up on you."

Who am I? There are times when I'm God's obedient child. I had a twelve-year old ask me last night, When are you happiest? I can say I'm happiest when I'm loving and serving in God's name. But I don't always love and serve in God's name. I can be very rebellious....I can be disobedient....I can shirk my responsibility.....I can thoroughly enjoy my sins. But I happen to have a God who says, "I won't let you get away with it. I'll put up a fight with you. I'll wrestle with you -- I'll pin you to the ground until I hear you cry "Enough!" And that's exactly what God did with Jacob. And then Jacob found out who he was: someone precious to God. And that's why I believe in the Church. And that's why I believe in Jesus Christ, because He is always reminding me of who I am.

When our Associate Pastor in his responsibility as Director of Youth Work gave the green light to the possibility of our youth preparing a musical that they'd take on the road, they'd write their own text. You know of course what I said: "This is wonderful! But Pastor, examine what they write. Make sure the

theology is correct!" My heart was warmed when I discovered what their

favorite song was: "Who Am I? What am I?
A child of God, you see.
I am God's child.
I'm someone special --
I'm a child of God, you see!"

And that's what happened that night with Jacob. God said, "You're mine."

And from that moment on his life became integrated and he discovered how wonderful it is to be comfortable with yourself. When you know that God has never given up on you, you reach the point where you don't ever want to give up on God.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"IN THE MEANTIME"

THERE ARE so many voices coming at us,
O God, saying so many things, it is so
easy to become bewildered and confused.
But grant that in this time and in this
place the voice that we now hear, no
matter how frail nor feeble, could be
recognized as some echo of the Eternal
Voice, Through Jesus Christ Thy Son,
our Lord, who when He came, came preach-
ing. Amen.

Exodus 13.17-18

I can readily understand why some people, the older they become, find increasing delight in reading the Scriptures. And that may be especially true as you turn to the pages of the Old Testament. For who cannot be fascinated by the way the world began, and how God chose this person and chose that person through whom to work and to make His promises come true.

I have been quite excited as I have been delving with the details of the book of the beginnings, the Book of Genesis and when what an exciting thing it is to move on into the Book of Exodus -- how God calls the Children of Israel out of Egypt, and He says, "You have been in bondage long enough, and now you head for the Promised Land." How excited they were, to think that it was there ahead of them! It would be theirs! -- a land flowing with milk and honey, a land that they could call their very own!

They got out of Egypt, alright, the Red Sea had been crossed. And then what in the world do you suppose they discovered on the face of God who was there ahead of them? God was shaking His head, and these were the words that they seemingly heard from His lips: "No! You can't! Not yet!"

...they were all signed up to get
into the Promised Land -- they had figured out a short-cut --
they'd go straight through the land of the Philistines....

And God shakes His head: "No -- you can't!"

The text for today's sermon, the 17th and 18th verses of the 13th chapter of the second book of the Bible, the Book of Exodus:

"And God led them, not through the land of the way of the Philistines, although that was near, but God led them round about, by the way of the wilderness."

You know, of course, what air travel has done to the steamship business. Britain's Cunard Line thought they could stem it for a bit, and I presume they paid perfectly good money to an ad writer to come up with a clever slogan that might make possible for people a greater appeal for travel by sea:

GETTING THERE IS HALF THE FUN

...the emphasis, you see, on the kind of thing that you'd experience as you start from one place and before you get to your destination. It never paid off, never made a dent, of course, in travel by air. And I suppose you know the reason why -- we are a people who want to get to where we want to go in a hurry. We don't want to waste time in getting there.

Remember what I told you some years back when Winifred and I had gone to New York to attend a meeting of the Executive Council of the Lutheran Church -- we had gotten our business done in short order and we didn't have to stay over until the next day, so we canceled our hotel reservation and decided to come back to Silver Spring. Those were the days when you could travel 60-65-70 miles an hour. We broke no laws, honestly we didn't. From the time we left Manhattan until the time that we arrived at 919 Highland Drive, four hours had elapsed. We moved right along. That was our intention.

But upon reflection it occurred to me that we hadn't done anyone any good in the meantime....we asked no help from anybody, and we gave no help to anybody. We arrived back in Silver Spring pretty much the same type person that we had been when we left Manhattan. When we travel speedily, we got here in

short order, but as far as making any difference in us, it didn't.

I promised Winifred that when we have the prized weeks of vacation come up in September and we head for the hills of home, that maybe once a week we might get in the car and decide that we'll hit the road -- not taking the super-highway, but one of the winding roads. We'll plan to get back, perhaps, to sleep in our own bed, but in the meantime we'll just go and drive slowly, leisurely, to see how much we can see, and to appreciate as much as we can appreciate of what's there to be appreciated.....and that hopefully in the course of the day we'll have some measure of an experience between the two of us that will add to our understanding of life, and maybe our understanding of one another. But to do that you travel leisurely. You don't get that kind of an experience when you speed along on the highway, the super-highway, that is.

What a contrast that trip from Manhattan to Silver Spring was to that trip that my father made, when at the turn of the century, at eighteen years of age, he got aboard the steamer in that magnificent harbor in Beirut, and headed toward Ellis Island. It took three weeks for that journey until he arrived in his promised land. Those three weeks were absolutely essential, even though they were in steerage - - what lessons they had to learn from the time they left Lebanon until the time they arrived in the land of the promise which was New York. This orientation, this getting ready, this preparing for the culture shock to which he would be exposed....learning to get along with people you had never met before. It was so essential.

Well, that's what God has in mind, I think, when He makes us take a certain amount of time to get from where we are to where we want to be, so that something could happen to us in the meantime. Any student of Bible history knows full well why God didn't let them go straight through into the land of the Philistines. Of all the enemies that they had to deal with, none was more formidable than the Philistines. And had they gone headlong into the land of

the Philistines, chances are the Children of Israel would have been wiped off the face of the earth, just like that! They weren't ready! And what's more, they weren't ready to be established in the Promised Land. This shows an exceedingly precious thing that God had in store for them. And you and I never appreciate exceedingly precious things unless we've prepared for them.

That's why some wonderful things that happen to some people that I know are wasted -- because they've never been able to appreciate, for the simple reason that they never had a prolonged period of anticipation, a period in which they had gone without the kind of thing that suddenly they get. So the Children of Israel had a God on their hands who shakes His head and says, "It's a no-no! You can't go in. You're not ready! It's going to take some time to prepare for it." And so He took them round-about by the way of the wilderness for forty years, and what lessons they learned -- how to get along with one another. How could they get along with all these other nations if they didn't master the art of getting along with themselves? They had to get used to the leadership of Moses.....and Moses had to be tried in his relationship with them if he was to remain their leader. That took a bit of doing -- at least forty years. But that's our God for you, again and again and ever so often He shakes His head and He says "No!" . . . which is also to be interpreted, you know, as a "Not yet!"....."No - not now -- later on, but you're not ready for it today."

I covet for myself always being able to relate to youth. I hope the day will never come when I'm denied some measure of an understanding relationship. But I must tell you it troubles me a great deal that frequently I fail in what I try to get them to understand -- that there are some things that they can't have right away. They're caught up in this spill-over, you see, of our generation which suffers from "instant-itis" -- "gimme-itis" -- "we want everything now!" I have a physician friend who two decades ago told me that

he rued the day when they termed such things as "wonder" drugs, for any number of their patients came in and wanted to be cured of their ailment within a matter of hours. And it just didn't happen that way.

Well, we have a generation of young folks on our hand who want things now. They were branded, weren't they, the NOW generation -- get with it today! They don't realize what a price they have to pay when they allow their enthusiasm to become unbridled. That's why you have teenage sex as a problem -- they want it now. They don't want to wait. And all the while God's saying, "Not yet -- you're not ready for it yet. This identification in such a personal way with another person involves responsibility.....

...it's hard for me to appreciate the drug culture, how they can allow irreparable damage to be done as they experiment. Oh, I can appreciate the desire to get away from the stress and strain -- even sensitive young people feel the weight of the world and clamor for some kind of a temporary euphoria.....

But I've also lived long enough to know that the kind of peace that passes all understanding, if you want to talk about euphoria, talk about God's kind of euphoria, the kind of peace that the world can't give, the kind of peace that the world can't take away.....and that kind of peace comes after struggle and strain, and the paying of a price.

Some time ago I was with some friends who were celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary of an honored couple. And of course they were quite excited about the fact that these twenty-five years had been invested and you had this wonderful feeling of good will. But I was realist enough to know that those twenty-five years had not just happened, that that record wasn't just established overnight. You had two-and-a-half decades of a measure of struggle, and learning to get along with one another. And you don't chalk up twenty-five

by a short-cut. It's an investment of time and concern.

I do some measure of counseling, as you know. And while I can assure people when they come to me that God can immediately forgive them -- no question about that! -- but I'm also realist enough to know that it takes a little while to get certain things out of your system. God may forgive you and you may be moved now to forgive somebody else, but this hatred that's been building up over a period of months and years may take a little while to get out of your mind and your heart -- just as your doctor may say to you, "We've done all that we can do, but now we'll have to wait until the system adjusts and until the poison gets worked out. It may take a little time." So God was giving the Children of Israel a generous measure of time in which to get certain things out of their system and also in order to introduce new elements which would hold them in good stead. But alas and alack, we live in a day and age that wants things now.

I suppose if I wanted to, even though we're here by the hundreds, we could turn this into a good old-fashioned testimonial meeting, and I could invite some of you to stand up who are sixty years of age and older, and what testimony you could bear to the fact that there are lessons that you have learned because there were certain times in your life when God shook His head and said "No -- not yet! You wait a little while....you're not ready. You can have it, and I want you to have it! But in the meantime, you've got to get ready for it."

One of the great lessons of life is this, my friend. It isn't how fast you get from where you are to where you want to be. It's what you learn in the process, the kind of person you become in the meantime. And isn't that the meaning of the journey of life to death? -- God's tremendously interested in the kind of person we become as we travel from birth to death. This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE WORKING OF MIRACLES"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

John 6:15-6

Name me ten things that God can do all by Himself, aside from creation...
...well then, name me eight.....five.....four.....you'll be hard-pressed,
my friend, honestly you will, to name the kind of thing that God usually does
all by Himself, aside from creation. You may be forced to admit that when God
wants to get something done, ordinarily He looks to somebody else to help Him.

Now don't get me wrong, I'd be the last person in the world to discourage
you from believing in miracles, if by believing in miracles you think in terms
of the kind of thing that God does by Himself -- I'd be the last person in the
world to discourage you from believing in the power of God, as moved by His
compassion. I'd be the first person in the world to encourage you to think in
these terms: that when God wants to get something done, He turns to us, points
His finger and says, "Now I need you - - you get into the act, you contribute
what you have to contribute."

Even the reading of the miracle that Suzanne read for us as the third
Lesson, the Gospel for the Day, the miracle that deals with the Syro-Phoenician
woman -- even that miracle was not performed without the evidence of what the
woman had to contribute -- nothing materially, but she had to put into the
picture her faith.

Now according to good Lutheran tradition, the Holy Spirit may inspire us
to respond, but God never takes us off the hook, God never allows us to go
free, as though there wasn't anything that we could do. Even the gift of sal-
vation requires our response. No man can save himself. Jesus Christ died for us

and offers us the gift -- but even there, in order to have it effective, man has to respond. Name me ten things....eight things....five things....four things that God does unaided. You may be hard-pressed to name them.

I'm thinking now particularly of our study of miracles. They can be very fascinating. Who doesn't go back and remember the days of his childhood, when the Sunday School teacher held him on the edge of the seat as she told about miracles -- they meant more to us, perhaps, than any other aspect of our Bible study. But the trouble is, most of us become fascinated by the fact that a miracle is something that God does by Himself, and I don't know that this is exactly true.

Let's take this miracle in particular, the miracle of the Feeding of The Five Thousand. The people had come to hear Jesus preach. They listened hour after hour, and then Jesus, realizing what the situation was, called to their attention that many of them had to travel quite a bit of distance before they would get back home, and as the Scriptures say, "They would faint by the way." So Jesus says they ought to be fed -- something ought to be done. And presumably there were those who immediately began to think in terms of a miracle! -- to feed five thousand people, and there on a hill-top! How could it be done?

A miracle was performed. We do refer to it as the Miracle of the Loaves and the Fishes. But let me disabuse you of thinking that it was something that God had done through Christ just by having Jesus Christ snap His fingers! It didn't happen that way. It happened only after Jesus Christ focused His eyes on the disciples, and said, "Something ought to be done" -- -- and I suppose they said, "Oh, yes! Get with it, God!".....that's the usual reaction when you and I find ourselves in a critical situation -- "Come on, God, we expect you to do something."

But the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the God who is forever challenging man. We talk about man's challenge to God -- "God, you

get with it!"....but like as not, a better understanding of God is God saying to man: "You get with it -- you begin with what you have, where you happen to be." And that's exactly what happened as this miracle is about to be performed. Jesus said, "How many loaves do you have?"

And then somebody said, "Here's a boy -- he's got some loaves and some fishes"....and then he ruined it all by saying, "But what are they among so many?"

....parenthetically, that's our usual reaction, isn't it? -- we're overwhelmed by some crisis, we see some glimmer of hope, but then we spoil it by saying, "But what's the use? It really won't matter....it's only a drop in the bucket...."

But Jesus Christ didn't take His eyes off that boy, He kept looking at him. And then the boy came forward and opened his hand, as much as to say, "Go ahead, Jesus, take it."

By the way, that open hand.....I have to tell you this, I saw a graphic interpretation of love not so long ago. It was simply an open hand, and underneath these words: "Love is an open hand." That's right, isn't it? When you love you don't grip and grasp. When you love you open your hand, as much as to say: "Go ahead -- help yourself -- take it!"

....and the other side of the coin is just as precious: when we're being loved, it's something that's being placed into our open hand. When we're to receive something, our hand has to be opened.....

And the exceedingly precious thing about that boy -- don't you ever think of him aside of thinking of the boy-with-the-open-hand: "Go ahead, God, You can have it." Whenever you understand miracles, where God is using people, chances are you'll have somebody with an open hand.

I say this to you for what it may be worth, that many of us go through life

having to face problems. We make a mistake when we think that all that we have to do is to wait for God to do something. With all the strength that my soul can command I want to encourage you to believe that God is able, and God will. But with all the strength that I can command I must also tell you that God may also find Himself in a position where He may say, "It's your move first -- You begin with what you have, you contribute what you have to contribute -- you begin by doing something. It's simply not enough to believe that I can do it - - but you've got to release your help. You must contribute!"

I'll give it to you for what it may be worth, I read it the other day. Its point will be well taken: "The Red Sea was not parted until the first Israelite got his feet wet." Believe in miracles? Of course! Let me encourage you. But be prepared, a condition may have to be met. God may say to you, "It's your move first."

....remember what Antonio said? -- "Why, even

God cannot make Antonio's violins without Antonio!"

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"GRACE SUFFICIENT"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from
God our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

II Corinthians 12:9

There's many an eating place between here and the hills of home, when Winifred and I travel homeward, that's been popularized by the Pennsylvania Dutch motif. And as we're eating we'll read some of the slogans that we see on the plaques, on the place mats, even on the napkins. Here's one, you'll recognize it:

"THE HURRIEDER I GO,
THE BEHINDER I GET!"

But the one that I think I like best is this:

"WHY ARE WE SO LONG SO DUMB,
SO SHORT SO SMART?"

Having reached the age that I have, I would to God that there were certain lessons that I could have learned much sooner than I think I have. I look back across the years and I think of certain things that have held me in good stead that have come a bit late on the scene. As an example: I wish that in my impressionable years there would have been those who would have planted upon the fabric of my heart the necessary truth that life could be difficult.

In the days of my youth I faced life with unbridled enthusiasm. Why not? I had good health, and before I even graduated from high school the claim of God had been made upon my soul, that I would one day be a pastor, and I could hardly wait until I could serve a congregation. I was eager to face life, and I had good and happy thoughts of all that was ahead.

But then life has a way of giving us a jolt, and sometimes they come a little bit sooner than we had thought, and we can find ourselves quite unpre-

pared for that fact. So if I had my life to begin over again, I would be greatly indebted to those who in my early years would caution me against some of the problems that most certainly would have to be faced.

We had a professor in theological seminary who tried to do that. He didn't realize the impact that he was making at that time because what problems would I have to encounter? And what he said to us was simply: "Now when you stand up to preach, in the first congregation that you'll be serving, as you look over the congregation . . . "

(just as I'm looking over the congregation this morning)

" . . . you may have reason to think that everything is wonderful as you look at your people. They will not readily reveal in their faces strain, anxiety or stress." "But," said that elder statesman of the faith, "Let me caution you young men who go out to preach. Within every single person's soul there are problems being carried, there are burdens that are being borne, and for some of them they are exceedingly grievous."

I didn't fully understand what he meant. But as the years continue to pass I have gained true appreciation for what he was trying to tell us. So much so, that I think I can say to you now quite earnestly that if I would be permitted to do it, which I won't, of course, I could say to one of you, or this person, or that person, "Here, stand alongside of me!"....and then I'd single you out there, maybe the fifth pew on the left, and I'd whisper to the person standing alongside of me, "Do you see that person? -- in the twenty-two years that God has given me in this congregation, let me tell you about the problems that that person has to face."....and then in a rather guarded manner I'd say, "Now look over here on this side - - "....and then I'd name the pew and I'd point exactly at you and this person would know exactly at whom I was pointing, and then I'd say, "Would you believe me if I were to tell you that this is the problem that that person has brought with him to church this very morning?"

.....and had you been standing alongside of me and you were to be privy to this kind of conversation, in all likelihood you would say, "I would never have believed it, Pastor, I would never have believed it!"

But this is a fact of life. Some of you have found it difficult, and some of you could bear testimony to the problems that are difficult to carry.

There's a well-known revivalist who conducts a television program, usually concluding, I think, with this remark: "Something wonderful is going to happen to you today." I find no quarrel with that, because I do believe that this is true. And happy indeed is that person who is made sensitive to the wonderful thing that's ahead of him, so that when it happens he can call it by its rightful name and fully appreciate it. I think it needs to be tempered, however.

There is another side of the coin, and I believe very strongly that we ought to be warned in advance that the untoward and the unexpected and the difficult is out there too! For the simple reason that when we have to face some of these things, some of us would be in far better shape knowing in advance the resources upon which we can draw when the burdens have to be carried and the problems have to be dealt with. Just as I can say to you, "Life can be wonderful!".....I am also in duty bound to say to you: "Life can be difficult."

There's a text for this, of course there is. You'll find it in the Second Letter the Apostle Paul wrote to Christians who lived in Corinth:

"My grace is sufficient for you; my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Now there's more than meets the eye with a casual reading of that text. Now bear with me.

First I must remind you a little bit about this man Paul. He, too, had unbridled enthusiasm for the cause of Jesus Christ as a convert. It was a glorious thing to be born again, and as he gave us to understand in some of his writings -- to placard the world for Jesus Christ! He wanted to go 'like

sixty' as we used to say.....

....and then he discovered that instead of being able to do an 18-hour day, he had to limp along on a 12-hour day.....

....instead of covering maybe 18 preaching points, in a month or so, he had to settle for 10 or 12....

....instead of writing so many letters that he would have liked to have written, he could only write a few number....

...so again and again he complained to God.

Now you need to know this, that these saints that we cherish, wonderful as they were, did not drop down fully fashioned from Heaven. They had their rough edges, and they had their moments when they could talk back to God and complain. I love what they say about St. Theresa, when she found life completely difficult, one day after another so burdensome -- she complained to Jesus Christ.....and He said, "That's the way I treat my friends," -- and she retorted, "And that's exactly why you have so few of them!"

...there's something to be said for a person who can be that honest!....

...and I'm suggesting to you that the Apostle Paul must have been quite honest with God, too, when he complained -- "Think of it, Jesus Christ, how many more churches I could establish if only I had my strength and stamina! Think of it, Jesus Christ, how many more letters I could get written for you -- how many more counseling sessions I could hold with these people who come back to me! But there's this thorn in the flesh, God -- it limits me. It's a burden that's difficult to bear -- why don't you take it away?" The Bible expresses it in classic fashion, how he kept saying, he implored that it be taken away. But the answer came: "My grace will be sufficient for you. Your strength will be made perfect in weakness." That's the answer that he got.

..."Face it, Paul, there is no thorn in this world

...Face it, Paul, you'll never reach the point where you
can say you have it made! "

Life can be difficult!

The life of Jesus Christ was no exception. Was He without enemies? Of course not. Did He end His years without a cross? -- of course not! That's the kind of world in which we're going to find ourselves.

Our Associate Pastor scans the congregation, as some of you may know, and he is always eager to find in the congregation the faces of young people, as is true for this service now, as was true for the other services -- young people, maybe between the ages of 12 and 25. He's pleased with those who show up because you and I both know that there are the far greater number of them that don't show up. And I've lived long enough to think that I know the reason why, one of the reasons why: young people thoroughly enjoy a measure of independence as soon as they can exercise it! And one of the things they want to do when they become independent is not to do some of the things that they had to do earlier.

Now there's a great deal to be said for independence, honestly there is. Don't let me be sold short on that score -- there's a great deal to be said for independence. But I'm always troubled by people who allow themselves to go so far that they become independent of their need for God. And that's the risk they run in their desire to be independent. Because for a while they can get along without God -- of course they can! We have evidence everywhere....

....they're doing nicely in their job -- they're going
up the ladder, one promotion leads to another....

....their kids are turning out half decent....

....they have a home, and perhaps a vacation spot....

....in no time at all, two cars in the garage, or at
least one in the driveway and the other in the garage....

...and they have a measure of good health. They're getting along quite well -- independent of God!

But then the late 40's set in, don't they? And the 50's...and the 60's. And then they begin to deal with problems that they hadn't known existed before that are most certain to come! I have a physician friend who tells me that "Surely, anybody is going to get arthritis if he lives long enough, in one form or another." But all the things that we used to check off on that list when we went for a physical that we didn't have, we discover the older we get, the possibility of getting those things, or at least some of them....

....and then the marriage that we thought was working out so beautifully -- could begin to deteriorate
....and the job that we thought was secure -- well, we find out that we could be expendable....

Then what?

When these problems have to be faced, will we have the necessary resources? Will we be able to say that "I know that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" - - and will we be able to say with the Apostle Paul: "I know that God's grace is sufficient."

Let me be very personal for a minute, will you? When I laid my father to rest, and I walked away from the grave with my mother, and in that moment, as some of you have experienced, made silent by the fact of death -- the parade of all the earlier years comes back in front of you. And I thought of my lifetime....and I thought of her lifetime....and I thought of my father who came as an immigrant to these shores. The world was so different here for him, the culture was so different, and the language. And he had to fight for every inch of ground that he gained....and he could be very stubborn as a fighter, and he could make life quite difficult. A good man, don't get me wrong. And as I walked away and I thought of my mother and her relationship to him, and

I thought of all the trouble that us six kids had caused her (at least five of them!).....I said to my mother, "Thank you for all that you did." And that little woman looked up with her big brown eyes and said, "But Raymond, it wasn't always easy." And she was absolutely right! And she had also discovered that in the face of one struggle after another, character was being formed, and lessons were being learned. And above all else, God's grace was sufficient.

So I've told you several things in the sermon this morning - -

-- no question about it, life can be wonderful!

-- no question about it, life can be difficult!

But what makes life wonderful is that in the face of the problems that we have to carry, in the burdens that we have to bear, God gives us the grace, and always in sufficient measure.

A number of years ago a business man in the United States of America, who was driving himself to the breaking point, flying to this and that business conference, handling great affairs and costly issues -- suddenly he was stricken down with a dread paralysis. When he regained a measure of limited health, he confessed to his pastor, "You know, the Lord had done all that, all that He could to make me stop and think, and slow down and realize that my real life did not consist in the business that I could do or the dollars that I might earn. Now that I'm paralyzed, this is the only way that He could say to me -- "Be still, and know that I am God."

That man is still paralyzed, but he's a bigger and a stronger man. At Christmas time that year he sent to his friends and former business associates a greeting card, together with a poem by an unknown author which reads as follows:

"I prayed for strength, that I might achieve:

I was made weak, that I might obey;

I prayed for health, that I might do great things:

I was given infirmity, that I might do better things;

I prayed for riches, that I might be happy:

I was made poor, that I might become wise;

I prayed for power, that I might have the praise of men:

I prayed for all things, that I might enjoy life:
I was given weakness, that I might feel
the need for God. "

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"PERSONAL DECLARATION"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

I John 1:1-3

This morning's sermon bears the title "Personal Declaration," and the text, the first three verses of the first chapter of the First General Epistle of John:

"That which we have seen from the beginning,
which we have heard, which we have seen with
our own eyes, which we've looked upon and
touched with our hands, have handled the word
of life, that which we have seen and heard
declare we unto you."

If you've been around an international airport lately, you're fully aware of the fact that they're coming home now by the thousands each day. Anyone who has done any amount of international travel can readily visualize the scene - - the day before you get to the airport or to the harbor, there's that feverish packing and the re-packing of the suitcases and the bags of many descriptions, making sure that you're able to get everything in, hoping, of course, that you may not be overweight.

But there is another concern, perhaps, that outruns that one, and that is the necessary preparation of the declaration sheets as you anticipate going through Customs.

I recall it vividly as I first encountered the Customs official, now some 30 years ago. Two-and-a-half months had been spent abroad in Western and Eastern Europe not too long after World War II. I had gone there to study, to observe, to put my finger as best I could upon the spiritual pulsebeat of what had happened. And now I was coming back. And I stood there, waiting to be greeted by the Customs official. Sternly and severely he looked at me and said, "Have

you anything to declare?"

The three decades have come and gone. I remain haunted by those words. I know exactly what he meant - - but I was philosophizing....and I was thinking upon the places I had been, the things that I had seen, first-hand, the experiences of which I had been part. And I remember having written home day after day to Winifred and to David and to Jon, telling them daily that when I came back I would not be the same person that had gone. No one who had ever seen what I had seen, as is true for anyone who travels, returns the same type person.

So as I stood there I heard the Customs official saying, "Have you anything to declare?" - - I knew what he meant, but I was thinking of other things, deep, serious thoughts, that I'd soon be declaring in no uncertain way. For within a year did I not go from this place and from that place declaring what I had seen and what I had experienced? This, too, becomes the traveler.

And some of you know very well that as soon as you have gone abroad, or whenever you have taken any trip, no matter where it may have been, you can't wait until you get home to tell people what you saw, and what you experienced.

I remember it and remember it well - - indulge me for a moment, if you don't mind.....

....Warsaw, that once wonderful and glorious city -- I saw it in 90% destruction. I had only to stand there amid the rubble and visualize nine out of every ten structures leveled to the ground....I have been in the Jewish ghetto, where I don't think I could find two bricks stuck together, so completely had vengeance done its work....

....I recall that city -- the Nazis did it systematically, one bomb went after another, one building fell after another in face of the advancing Russians - - - I had seen it, I had been

there....."Have you anything to declare?" - -

I was haunted by the words of the Customs official.....it was some 30 years ago last week, a beautiful day in August, when I went from golden Prague to not-too-far-away Lidice, where the village had been. They showed me where once the barn had stood....they showed me where once the school house had been, the school house to which they brought the women and the children and then carted them away to the death camp.....they showed me the barn against which they had lined up the men and the boys and shot them, and then they were dragged off to the grave -- which they themselves had dug!

.....I looked at the field of corn where Lidice had been. And so completely had they wiped Lidice off the face of the map, as they burned the buildings and the village and turned the debris under soil, and planted corn - - - in reprisal for the death that had been concocted by a loyal Czech patriot against Heydrich the Hangman, as they referred to him.....

.....I had been there.....I could not be the same....

"Have you anything to declare?" - - "Have you anything to say?"

.....I had seen the official moving picture used as evidence in the War Crime Trials in Nuremberg -- the stacks of soap made from human flesh....the gloves and lamp shades made from tanned human skin.....I had seen the open graves, the skeletal remains -- these things I had seen.....

"Have you anything to declare?" - - "Have you anything to say?"

The question of the Customs official haunts me.

But then as I come to this sacred desk this morning, thinking of all those who return from abroad being asked the same question, I muse in your midst as I reflect upon this precious passage of Scripture:

"That which we have seen from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled the word of life -- that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."

Every single one of you within hearing of my voice, as you have taken your journey through life, have experienced Jesus Christ, or you would not be here. You have had an encounter with Him. Now at this particular stage in your journey, what have you to say? On the basis of your experience with Him, what can you declare as you face a new chapter in your life that awaits you?

I recall those two-and-a-half months going from one country to another, and always the filling out of the necessary forms, preparing the necessary declaration sheets. What, now, was the position of my currency as I crossed this border -- had I more or less money?

....and I mused upon that -- inwardly speaking, am I a richer or a poorer person -- because of this last stage in my journey and as I face a new stage in my journey?

All of you now, as you journey through life from one stage to another, as you encounter one new hill-top as over against another hill-top....as you go down into one valley as over against another valley -- on the basis of what now is at hand, what have you to declare....what have you to say?

I am not unmindful of the fact that I stand among you now as a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, I am not unmindful of the fact that each time I have a relationship with some of you, as we journey together, as we face one new chapter in your life as over against another new chapter, as we go from one country into another country, and I am constrained to declare to you on the basis of my experience what I know about Jesus Christ.....

....and when you come to me as some of you have come, terribly frightened about the border that you have to cross now as some

new chapter is going to be written in your life, and you look to me on the basis of my experience, where I have been with Jesus Christ, and I know the constraining influence that rests upon my soul to speak the word that might hold you in good stead on what I have seen and what I have heard.....

Life is always inviting us into some new country, figuratively speaking -- there is always another border to cross. And as you enter into that territory, what have you to declare? What have you to say?

Let me ask you to look at this page in the book now. A homespun thing, perhaps, you may call it. You may not have considered it in this manner. I remember sitting down with a surgeon not so long ago, having a casual conversation with him, so it seemed. But bless his soul, he'd had a heart attack, and he's much more relaxed now. He takes time just to talk with people. And he becomes philosophical very easily. And in the course of my brief encounter with him, he said, "That man who was here an hour ago, in the very same chair where you're sitting - - I had to tell him about a whole new world that he's about to enter. I had to tell him that his teenage daughter is pregnant. He was absolutely furious -- to think that this should happen to his family, to think that she would do this to him, and to her mother!"

...and then, bless his soul, he said to me, "I realize that I had to say something to him, because very shortly he'd be meeting her for the first time in the face of the word that I just gave him... ..and so I said to him, "Do you realize that what you now say to her, the first words that you will speak, will have an effect upon your relationship with her for the rest of your life!" . . . a whole new world that had to be entered . . . "Have you anything to declare -- have you anything to say?"

Look at it this way -- not to dwell on the morbid, please -- God forbid!

...but she returns from her physician. The diagnosis, the prognosis is not good. She can't wait until she gets home to share it with her mate of 35 years. On the basis of his travels through life, now, on the basis of what he has observed and experienced, will he have anything to say?....will he have anything to declare? that can hold her in good stead as she journeys into this whole new territory?

Life is always putting this kind of pressure upon us, you see. And that's one reason why God allows us the experiences of the past -- to hold us in good stead for all that lies ahead.

In my pilgrimage through life I have come to appreciate as never before the wonderful companionship of Jesus Christ. I would not serve you well, nor would I be faithful to my Lord if I would not declare that to you in whatever years that God still gives to me to be your Pastor. I hope that again and again and again I'll be able to declare to you the wonders of God's grace, the security of His providence, and the prospect of Heaven. "I will never leave you - - I will not forsake you - - I will always be with you"...."and in my Father's house, when the journey's over, I will have a place for you." These things I believe, these things I've experienced as I've traveled in the company of Jesus Christ, and I happily declare to you as you face what lies ahead. And as you have gone from one border to another, as you experience one untoward thing after another, as the Christian pilgrimage, as the Christian pilgrim, as the Christian who is on pilgrimage - - what will you write at the bottom line?

I was delighted as I look back across the years -- we've had Tent Troupe now for nine years -- next year will be their tenth anniversary, God willing -- as fine as anything that they've done: "The Diary of Ann Franck". You remember it, don't you? You remember the story, you remember the movie? This precious youngster, who with her family had been in hiding...and then someone revealed to the authorities where they had been...the sirens sound....the Gestapo come, they cart them off to the death camp. They find Ann's diary. What does she

write as the bottom line? --

"I still believe that people are good at heart."

That's something to be able to say.

But I'll tell you something that's greater than that to be able to say.
As I've journeyed through life and gone from one border to another, the goodness of God remains, His promises never fail. Now if you can't say this in your travel so far, then you haven't had a very profitable journey.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"CARPENTER WANTED"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son, Jesus
Christ our Blessed Lord. Amen.

hch 2: 49

The sermon on this day which is so close to Labor Day bears the title "Carpenter Wanted" - - and the text is the 49th verse of the second chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, the words of a twelve-year-old:

"Did ye not know that I must be
about my father's business?"

Had you come to Saint Luke Church this morning driving up Colesville Road and then made a turn on Highland Drive, you may have noticed, as others have, that there were three signs on the church lawn . . .

-- one of them on the church lawn proper has been there for some time. It announces to the passers-by that for more than twenty years now we have had a Christian Day School, and inquiries are invited.....

-- the second sign is the main church bulletin board, and that announces the fact that this is Saint Luke Lutheran Church, Silver Spring, Maryland, with services at 8:30 - 9:45 - 11:15 and 5:00 p.m.....

-- the other sign is not nearly as prominent. It's been placed there in recent months. It says: CARPENTER WANTED

(it's reassuring to me to know that it is
'carpenter' and not 'preacher'!)

The sign is there because the construction people need laborers, and carpenters. It's essential to the task that remains to be done.

I muse as I think upon this, that usually when the church puts out a call for helpers, and makes an announcement that people are needed, we ask for Sunday

School teachers, we ask for people to serve on committees, we ask for people to become involved in the work of the church. When the church puts out a call for help, she ordinarily does not ask for carpenters, plumbers, electricians -- unless, perchance, she's engaged in some physical construction.

In the 45 years that I've known Winifred, I've gone with her on occasion to that little white frame church nestled in the hills of a place that's appropriately called Pleasant Valley, in the hills of home. This Baptist church has had a number of preachers in these years that I've known Winifred -- it's a small congregation, it's rural, they don't stay very long, as you might know.....and according to good Baptist tradition each preacher brings the stamp of his own personality.

There was one preacher not so long ago who shook up the congregation a bit, but only for a short while because eventually they've become enamored by his innovation. He suggested, the first time that he was there in August, and as he came to the last Sunday in August, that when they came to the first Sunday in September, they would not wear their Sunday-best when they came to worship.....but the people who worked in that community would wear, as they came to church, whatever clothing they were accustomed to wearing when they went about their day's tasks. And so when that first Sunday in September came, the Sunday nearest Labor Day, there was the farmer in his overalls....there was the mechanic, whose hand could readily be seen as a greased hand....there was the carpenter, in his overalls or whatever he was accustomed to wearing -- it left a marked impression upon the congregation.

For I sometimes say to myself, the church does say to you, "Come as you are, whatever your station in life." And it would be a very salutary thing if the fact could be impressed upon us that you happen to be who you are according to the work that you perform. I find it a very gratifying experience when we have those services every hour on the hour on Ash Wednesday, when we encourage people to separate themselves from their day's work and to come just for twenty minutes, and so they cross the threshold -- there are our military men in their uniforms....and there

come the nurses in their uniform.....suppose the fellow came fresh from the lab with his uniform?.....suppose Curtis May would have come this morning, with that long white gown that he wears as a veterinarian when he goes to the operating table? Now because most of you are white-collar workers, suppose we labeled you as you came?

....I'm tremendously impressed by the fact that when the service is concluded, and then you go your separate ways and you fan out into the world, I say to myself, this, then, is where you provide the Christian witness. This thing of being a Christian is not simply a one-hour-a-week affair. For God's sake, disabuse yourself of the notion that this is the only hour of the week when you're Christian -- whether you're Christian only when you think in terms of your relationship with a particular group of people, the integrity of your Christian witness is to be experienced in this fellowship which is Saint Luke Church. But the integrity of your Christian witness is also to be experienced when you buy and sell...and read and write and think....and enter into transactions and formulate policy....and go to a drawing board - - this, too, becomes the Christian.

In a certain sense the Christian Church does cry out "Carpenters Wanted" - - "Electricians Wanted" - - "Engineers Wanted" - - "Housewives Wanted" - - "Mothers Wanted" - - "Fathers Wanted"

Now let's get back to the text, you heard me say, the words of a twelve-year old - - "Did you not know that I must be about my father's business?" Then what did He do thereafter? - - it's as though He'd been reading the "Help Wanted" column in the Nazareth Herald, and as His eye went down the list: "Apprentice needed, in a carpenter's shop" - - He who said, "Did you not know that I must be about my father's business?" - - went right back to a Nazareth village, to a village called Nazareth, and went to work in a carpenter's shop! Was He less about His Father's business when He was in the carpenter's shop than when, as this stained glass window

pictures for us, He was in the synagogue talking with the learned men?

You must also remember that there was a time in His life when He was thirty years of age and a voice from Heaven was heard to say as it was focused directly upon Him: "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased" - - and are you aware of the fact that up to that point He had yet to preach His first sermon! "This --" the one "in whom I am pleased"....and He wasn't a preacher. He had been a carpenter.

The Church in years gone by, a couple of hundred years, that is, centuries ago, made the mistake of allowing certain people to think that they weren't doing God's work unless they went off to the convent or to the monastery. Martin Luther helped to give the world a terrific jolt at that point when he kept talking about the "priesthood of all believers." Brother Lawrence was absolutely right, bless his soul, when he said that with him the time of business or work does not differ from the time of prayer. It was the young President, John F. Kennedy, wasn't it, who said in one of his significant addresses, when he was trying to think of the kind of world that we ought to have here on earth, a better kind of world - - and wasn't he the one who said something to this effect: "Man must make God's work come true on earth."

We have each Sunday morning a half-hour prayer period in the Chapel of the Grateful Heart. Some of you come to it. And if you are made aware of the nearness of God as you worship here at whatever hour in the course of the day, it could well be that the prayer that's offered in your behalf is being answered, because that's the kind of thing that happens in that time of intercession, when we ask God to allow the Holy Spirit to have free rein upon us.

Well in the course of our devotions this morning we used the Bidding Prayer. And one of those prayers asks that here on earth, that God would take away famine, that here on earth God would take away disease....that here on earth God would give a safe journey to those who travel. And my mind began to wander as that prayer was being offered - - for I think I asked the proper question: alright, God,

we want these things to disappear -- we want these things to be handled here on earth, but we're asking you to do it. And how are You going to get it done? - -

-- how are we made free from disease unless there are those who work with the test tube? unless there are those who do the necessary research....unless there are those who give themselves to preventive medicine, as well as its actual practice and application in time of need? -- by physicians, and nurses, and technicians -- you name them. You want God to do it? God will do it as He has His agents, His carpenters, His plumbers, His electricians.....

-- you want hunger to disappear? -- you need farmers -- that's how God gets His work done.....

-- when our young people go on a journey or any of you go on a journey, you ask me to pray for you -- I ask that God's journeying mercies may attend you....and how does God get that prayer answered?

-- by having an airplane pilot who got a good night's sleep the night before -- by an airplane pilot who is surrounded by people who love him and care for him, so that when he goes into the cockpit he can be free from unnecessary strain and distress. That's how journeying mercies are possible -- by state troupers who do their work wisely and well on the highway - - - by mechanics who discharge their obligation faithfully, so that the car was made sound to travel . . .

I told you before, I can't think of a single thing aside from Creation that God has ever done by Himself and by Himself alone. God needs His agents, His workers, His carpenters, His plumbers, His electricians.

For so many years the Son of God went back day after day after day, and with His hand He picked up a hammer, and a saw, and a plane. I can see Him as I stood outside a carpenter's shop at Nazareth...I can visualize that olive-skinned youngster, with the dark hair and the dark eyes -- hardly being able to carry that yoke

for the oxen. And Joseph had said, "Now, Jesus, take it for me. Rest when you have to, but take it -- make the delivery." ...and Jesus stopping every now and then and putting it down and running His hand over it -- smooth, and solid!...and knowing a measure of pride in the work that His father and He had done together. And when He delivers it, to know that there is no rip-off. The price tag was an honest price for an honest day's labor. That's what He was doing all of those years before He turned His back on that carpenter's shop.

For twenty years Jesus worked in the carpenter's shop. And ask yourself this question: "What was He doing all that time, From boyhood then to early prime?

Was He then idle, or the less

About His father's business?"

You know what He was doing. He was working each day, offering each day's work to God, making plows and yokes to the glory of God.

One of my unfulfilled dreams, I'm reasonably certain will remain that way to the end of my days -- was a desire that I had to visit cemeteries in country church yards and to record the epitaphs that I would find on tombstones. In that delightful holiday to England, some seven years ago, I began that, put some of them down. There was one that I wanted to see that I didn't get to see for myself, but I am told that it exists.

In a certain village there was a man who was highly esteemed -- as a Christian, as a churchman. What do you suppose was placed on that stone as an epitaph, as other people would come and pay tribute to him and remember him for the kind of person that he was? His name, incidently, was John Jones. And this is the way the epitaph reads:

"Here lies the body of John Jones,
Who for 30 years repaired shoes
in this village to the Glory of God."

"If Jesus built a ship, she'd travel trim;
If Jesus roofed a barn, no leaks would be
left by Him;
If Jesus planted a garden He would make it
like Paradise;
If Jesus did my day's work, it would delight
His Father's eyes."

Somewhere in my readings I came across a story of a chap -- perhaps you would never have given him the second look. He came to church on a Sunday, didn't appreciate too much the kind of preaching that he heard. But I suppose out of habit he came Sunday after Sunday. I should also tell you he was a carpenter by trade. But the thing that meant most to him on the Lord's Day, oddly enough, was after he had had the Sunday dinner with his mate of a good many years -- he would secret himself out to the carpenter shop where he worked.....not to finish any particular job on Sunday, but oddly enough, he reached for a copy of the New Testament that he had, and he always went back to the same page, where the reference is to Jesus, the carpenter's son....

....and with a great deal of satisfaction he
would say to himself: "Jesus of Nazareth - - Carpenter!
That's my trade!"

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

October 8, 1978

"IN THE TIME OF YELLOW CORN"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son, Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

29.4
gnt

Let me begin by asking you a question, a very personal question. So personal is the question that some of you are reluctant to answer it at all. The question is: How old are you?

...now with whatever figure you put in front of you, known perhaps only to you and to God, I should also add the other question: At what age would you like most to be, should you not be satisfied with your present age? Now that's quite a question.

For most people in a particular category have a desire to be at some other age than what they are right now. I suppose a youngster who is fourteen or fifteen years of age wants to be somewhat older, for the simple reason that he can't wait until he gets his driver's license.....and I suppose a youngster who is fifteen or sixteen wants to be much older because he can't wait until he can get out on his own -- get away from home, assert much more independence than what he's able to do right now.

So maybe it all depends at what age you happen to be when you answer the question: At what age would you rather be? A person who is seventy years of age who walks with reluctant step, whose vision is growing dim -- ask that person what age he'd rather be -- and in all likelihood he'd answer you, he'd much rather be twenty years younger. It all depends upon the conditions, the circumstances, the age that you happen to be when you're called upon to answer the question: At what age would you rather be?

Today we celebrate the Festival of The Harvest. This festival rightfully belongs in the Calendar of the Church.....for a number of different reasons -- if

not, most certainly this reason: to keep ever before us the fact of the harvest. The harvest doesn't suddenly come upon us. It's the result of all that has gone before. You can't have the harvest without the spring-time and intervening summer period. The title for this sermon on this day that marks the Festival of The Harvest is "In The Time of Yellow Corn." And the text is from the Book of Job, and you'll have to listen carefully as I read it for you because you'll be inclined to think that I've mis-read the text. But let me assure you, I haven't:

"O that I were as I was in the days
of my autumn."

Now if you're in company with some Bible translators, you'll be saying that shouldn't read autumn - - Job really is saying, "If I were as I was in the days of my youth" - - - "Backward, o backward, turn back in your flight - - "...as one cries out to time - - - "Make me a child again, just for tonight." Any number of people I know are fighting age. They spend all kinds of money to keep themselves youthful, and there's nothing particularly wrong with that except that they're fighting the fact of age. Any number of people that I know are not too content with being surrounded by people of their own age. They've got to be with the younger set, and they spend perfectly good money to go where they are and to do what the younger set does....and even to look much as they look. We fight age.

No so that old man Job. He was growing old -- he was proud of it. You ask me: At what age would I rather be? -- I can happily say to you, now that I'm 63 and seemingly perpetually 39 -- why shouldn't I want to be 63? I'm not at all inclined to turn back the clock, and I find myself still at this age trying to keep from pushing, pushing time.

Bear with me as I tell you this. Europeans make much of their 60th birthday. I'm not a European, but I did make much of my 60th birthday. In my own quiet way I headed for the hills of home on that 9th day of May three years ago. I went to the highest part of the hill nearest the little place where we live in the country.

I wanted to be there alone....and I looked as far as I could to the north, the east, the south and the west. And then I thought of the sixty years that had come and gone, and how insignificant they really were as far as those hills were concerned. Yet those hills had seen the returning cycle of seed-time and summer and harvest, and the nestling of winter itself.....

...I thought of Winifred and her encesstral stock, how coming from Europe they settled in those hills, and all the things that they endured from their seed-time to harvest....

...I thought of my father as he came as an immigrant from the Middle East, and all the things that he endured until he came to the sunset slope of life.....

.....and there I stood, having reached an age that I thought I would never reach. It was a sobering experience. And all of a sudden I got things in proper perspective....and that's when I began to thrill anew at being precisely the age that I was.

Job was now seeing the winter season of his life settle in. He was having a rough time of it, as anyone knows who has read the Book of Job. And as he reflects, he thinks of other years and other days, and he has his moment when he'd rather have another period of time, and it's not the day of his youth. It's not the day of his prime. It's the day of the autumn-tide. You can read it for yourself in that Book of Job. And you'll never forget it, will you, it's called the wisdom of Job. Job touches upon some of the fringe benefits that come to a man who has reached the autumn-tide -- a man who is comfortable with himself...a man who recognizes the meaning of basic values....the man who knew a measure of joy in realizing that there were young people in that day, God bless them, who respected age. And when he came near to where they were they would bow in his presence and respect him, because they believed that there was a certain something about him, having reached the age that he had. Job reflects for us in that book that bears his name, how when he would stand up to speak, people would respect

what he had to say, because they honestly believed that experience and age give a man a perspective that only experience and age can give. So that's why he says "It's the autumn of my life that I cherish."

When I began my ministry, for some unexplainable reason I was intrigued by what I'm about to read for you now. At 25 one doesn't much think of the autumn, but for some unexplainable reason it made its claim upon my soul even then. A friend inscribed it on parchment for me. It hangs in my study at the parsonage -- the words of a revered Scotsman:

"Brethren, all of us have to face the autumn, if we are granted room and time. Let no man dread it, if only God is in his heart and is his health and stay. Under Him the autumn is and should be the day of fruit, the time of the yellow corn, the season of maturity and hope. But without God, or the presence and promise of Jesus Christ, I can well believe that I should dread the autumn more than death itself. For what is any man's autumn but a grim mockery if there be no inner harvest?"

I'm fully aware of the fact that as I come to the sacred desk this morning, that this sermon will have an appeal primarily for those of you who are 60 years of age and beyond. You are the only ones who can fully appreciate this sermon. But I dare say, all of you who are considerably younger can well afford to recognize the truth that's inherent in the preaching of this sermon. For the autumn does come. It follows the seed-time and the summer. And the time to get ready for the autumn is when you are young.

One of the tragic things that I experience in friends who are contemporary is to see how they've reached this stage in life and they have no inner harvest, no fruit of the spirit, no disciplined life, no integrity upon which to rely...and even God is a stranger to them. And the nearer they get to the end of their pilgrimage on earth, the more they become afraid. I frankly confess to you that I am thoroughly enjoying this chapter in the pilgrimage. My appreciation for the friendship of Jesus Christ, whom I have known across these years, becomes richer

and deeper as these years roll by. I find myself in the company of David Livingstone, who in deepest darkest Africa kept his sanity by repeating to himself his favorite text, the words of Jesus Christ:

"Lo, I am with you always - - I will never leave
you, I will never forsake you . . . "

...and as each year came and went David Livingstone said, "These are the words of a gentleman I can trust -- the years have proven it."

This is what happens as one year follows another, to discover how wonderful it is to be a friend with God, and to know that the decision that you've made to follow His Son, Jesus Christ, as Lord and Master constantly holds you in good stead. These are the dividends you draw as each succeeding year comes and runs its course. And then to be able to see life from a certain perspective -- not that feverish pace of youth, not the unbalanced time and energy of the early 30'sbut the stability that sets in as each decade builds upon another decade, and you know that your foundation is certain.

And as grand and as good as anything is that the older one becomes, and I speak for myself, the less there is dread of death. For why should one be afraid when already he's known the friendship of Jesus Christ? -- when already in this world he's tasted a bit of eternity through God's sheer unadulterated love. So I can fully appreciate and say for myself as the beloved Pope John XXIII as he wrote of the end of his earthly pilgrimage, said magnificently: "My bags are packed."

But suppose when the autumn comes and the time of the gathering of the harvest is upon us, there is no inner harvest? This is the tragedy. I keep handy, close to my study chair, this unsigned quotation that deals with this very thought. Someone having reached a certain period in life, and longing for the fruits of the spirit, and he had never made the investment, he had never sown the seeds, he had nothing to gather

. . . . "As the threats of war and the cries of the dispossessed were sounding in his ears, Western Man fell into an uneasy sleep. In his sleep he dreamed that he entered the spacious store in which the gifts-of-God-to-men are kept, and he addressed the angel behind the counter by saying: "I have run out of the fruits of the spirit -- can you re-stock me?"

...what a pity to reach the autumn of life and to have run out of love, and patience, and hope, and faith!....

...when the angel seemed about to say 'No' - he burst out:

'In place of war, afflictions, injuries, lying and lust -- I need love -- I need joy -- I need peace -- I need integrity -- I need discipline. Without these I shall be lost!'

.....and the angel behind the counter replied: 'At this time we don't stock fruits - - only seeds.'"

But when the time of the gathering of the harvest is come, the time of the sowing of the seed is long since past. And that's something to think about.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

" . . . WHERE ONE'S MOUTH IS"

GRACE, Mercy and peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Psalm 137-

And that's the way it is today in Saint Luke Church. It has not always been this way for Christians, for believers, in other parts of the world. In fact, in some parts of the world it isn't that way right now. They cannot gather as we have gathered -- freely, willingly, and with a song upon our lips. There is no question where our heart is, there is no question where our mouth is.

The text for this brief meditation is really a cry of lament. Psalm 137 has a line that reads in this manner:

"How can we sing the Lord's song in a
strange land?"

They had been taken captive, Jerusalem was far, far away. The days that they had thoroughly enjoyed when, as a free people, they could take the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and sing as they marched, that day now was a memory. And their captors were tormenting them, taunting them by saying, "They tell us you can sing -- why are you silent now? -- where is your mouth? -- what's happened to your tongue? -- " "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" They couldn't sing, they said, because they had nothing to sing about.

We have so much to sing about here today in Saint Luke Church. This is the way it is.....and that's why we've come singing, because we are numbered in the ranks of the redeemed -- we have a Saviour who loves us, and whom we love.

But every now and then I say to myself, in order to better appreciate what I now enjoy, let me think what it could have been. Eleanor Basinger wrote me the letter. She had come, not so long ago, the first Sunday after we had put up that barrier in the stair-well, the stairs that lead down to Bieber Hall, the stairs

that lead up to the Christian Education Building. There's a modification feature in our property improvement program taking place there. She didn't know that the barrier had been erected, and as her habit was, she was going to go upstairs.... and when she came to it suddenly she was jolted -- there was the barrier. It was sealed off. And then with the perception that became her jolt, she mused and said - - "And suppose Saint Luke Church would have been sealed off in its entirety -- suppose we lived in that part of the world where it's verboten to go into the church?"

Some of us have traveled on the other side of Winston Churchill's so-called 'Iron Curtain.' We have seen how the grass remains uncut deliberately to discourage people, we have seen how the churches go into disrepair because they're not allowed to support the churches. I still visually recall so well the sign that reads "MUSEUM" indicating that this is now a public structure...it had once been a church! They tell me in Moscow there's an Anti-God Museum in which they have in glass cases relics of a day that's come and gone....a Bible...a chalice...a crucifix. And there are those who lament: "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

It's not that way now. But suppose it were that way? Suppose we did not have this Festival of Praise? In order to appreciate anything one must always superimpose it against the background of how it might have been. I cannot foresee any time in the States when by official decree churches will be closed -- of course not. But I have traveled around the country-side where churches have been closed because people no longer went to them, the people no longer supported them. We have something to sing about and we know where our mouth is, because we know where our heart is.

I've a notion that I've never researched -- I have to be honest with you --

it remains a notion and it's an opinion that I cherish: I'm convinced that if a person has any kind of a singing voice at all, it can be said that when he begins to sing his basic character and identity can be revealed. That's why I cherish for myself the reputation Saint Luke Church could have as a 'singing congregation' -- because we have something to sing about and Someone to whom to sing.

Well now, let's get back to this notion that I have that a person's real identity begins to surface, if he has any singing voice at all, when he begins to sing.

It's been documented, take my word for it -- it's been documented. And it comes out of those terrible days of the Nazi atrocities, when they were taken prisoners. They deliberately depersonalized them, tried to destroy them as persons. And they fairly succeeded again and again. But in the case of this woman -- hear me now and hear me well.....

...the Commandant had been told that she had been a marvelous singer, and had a remarkable career also as a dancer. And he was told that she was in his prison. He commanded that she be brought to him and stripped naked....and his official order was "Now sing! Now dance!"

....folks who knew her knew how her personality had been destroyed to a degree by their deliberate design.....but then as they listened she began to sing...then her feet began to move, and as she sang she twirled herself hither and yon until she came to the place where the Commandant was, and by her charm she diverted him....and reached for his pistol and shot him dead - - this man who was the personification of Evil. Only as she began to sing did her true identity as a person emerge.

Here in Saint Luke Church as we begin to sing our true identity emerges.

We know where our mouth is because we know where our heart is. But is it too much to suggest to you now as we face the next immediate weeks, as we launch our stewardship thrust in Saint Luke Church, that it's never enough just to sing. The true identity of the people of this parish is also revealed by what they do with their hands, in ministering concern for people and support of the Lord's work by the way they reach for their pocketbooks.

This is my simple message to you this year as we anticipate 1979, a year when we ought to sing as we've never sung before -- because it's the year in particular that helps us to get ready for another milestone in the life of this congregation. We'll be 40 years old by 1980. And God's been good to us. And every single one of you, if you had an opportunity, could take a "walk-through" with the pastors, or the deaconess, as we go from person to person and day by day, walking by our side and seeing how the channel of God's love is being unleashed in this community, because you know where your heart is, you know where your mouth is.....but now for yourself, as you look at the lines for the title of this sermon - - fill in the preceding words.

...and that's something to think
about, too.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"IN PRAISE OF A NAME SAINT"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

11 Timothy 3:11

It was 39 years ago this month that I presume the young congregation was knowing a measure of satisfaction in realizing that they did have a charter list, that come January in 1940 there would be a brand new congregation in the suburbs of northwest Washington.

I can well imagine some of those people who eventually became charter members anticipating the meeting that was going to be held, as somebody said, "What do you suppose will be on the agenda tonight?" - - suppose it was the time when they were going to consider the name for the congregation.

It's always a great moment in the life of a family when a baby comes into their lives, and the decision has to be made: how shall this child be called? how shall this child be named? By the same token, organizations and fellowships give a great deal of earnest consideration as to the name by which they will be known. So I presume there was a great deal of interest at that meeting: "What shall this new congregation be called."

I have never quite found out why they happened to have called themselves Saint Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church. I am^{not} certain, had I been present, that I would have voted for that name. But that's completely beside the point. But that is our name, and we've had it now for all these years, come January 1979 we'll mark our 39th anniversary. Why do you suppose they chose that name? Who knows?

Well, it occurred to me while the Gospel Lesson was being read, that if one wants to rationalize after the fact, he wouldn't have any problem at all. For

the closing section of Saint Luke Gospel deals with the precious truth that the last thing that took place in the life of our Blessed Lord, as far as the disciple band was concerned, took place in a suburban setting. Jesus took His disciples to Bethany, some distance from metropolitan Jerusalem itself. And there He met with them and gave His parting command. Well, there's justification for calling this congregation in the suburbs of the Nation's Capital Saint Luke, because it's the Gospel writer, Luke, who reminds us of this great moment, parting moment at that, in the life of our Lord, when He gave the command that they were to go on now and to continue His work.

In the prayer that our Associate Pastor offered at the altar this morning, the prayer that's especially designed for Saint Luke, Evangelist Day, the burden of that prayer is that as Luke, evangelist and teacher, was true to his vocation, so the church in our day should be true to its vocation. So it's in that manner and spirit that I come to this sacred desk this morning, to preach this sermon on our Name's Day.

I suggest to you that we ought to make a great deal of our name. Any person ought to examine the meaning of his own name. I don't think it's an untoward thing at all for a person occasionally to say to his parents, "Why did you call me by this name? Why did you choose this name?" It doesn't happen very often, but I'm told, rarely there are those who will change their name because they're not quite satisfied with their given name. And for reasons that seem important to them they'd much prefer to choose another name.

Well, we are called by Saint Luke. Now this sermon is meant to be informative, perhaps not as inspiring as you might wish, but at least informative. Now what can I tell you about Luke, whose name we bear, whose name we proudly bear?

Well, that second Lesson that was read for you by the Lesson Reader today

says something very kind and warm and tender about him. The old man Paul is writing a letter to Timothy, his younger friend, and he reflects upon the fact that life is running out for him. He has some good things to tell his younger friend Timothy, he has some sad things that he's constrained to tell him. One of the sad things is that some of his friends, in whom he had placed a great deal of trust, are no longer with him. They've forsaken the Gospel, they've succumbed to the ways of the world. And then he tells about others who have gone to different places, and he says in a very poignant fashion, this old man for whom life is running out, as he writes to his younger friend, he says: "Only Luke is with me." - - - that's a beautiful thing to say about a person, that he would be found faithful, a good and genuine companion to an older person.

And then Paul, perhaps caught up by the happiness of this thought, tells Timothy that he should fulfill his mission, simply to suggest as Luke had fulfilled his mission and is found faithful, this is my advice to you, my young friend.

And I don't think that it's too much to suggest that if Luke returned to Saint Luke congregation, and he would be our guest preacher this morning, that we'd say, "Now, we bear your name, Luke. What advice do you have for us, what good counsel?" And in all likelihood, not being vain at all, he'd say, "You be faithful to your mission! Spread the word as I spread it!"

Now what can I tell you about the way he spread it? What can I tell you about Luke himself? Well, may I surprise you if you don't know your Bible as well as you ought to know it, by telling you that he was not one of the original twelve disciples -- that's really important -- and he was never part of the inner circle.....

...I should also tell you, in case you don't know it, that he was a Gentile, he wasn't a Jew. He didn't have all the advantages that the Jews had....

....I should also tell you that when he wrote his record of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, he wrote the finest record, I dare say, of all the four -- Matthew, Mark and John each have distinctive characteristics, but any number of Bible scholars will tell you that Luke has the most beautiful of all the records of the life and teachings of Jesus. And that's something worth knowing....

I should also tell you that when he wrote his record he maintained the standard of excellence, there's nothing slipshod about it at all. And those of us who comprise membership in this congregation need to remember that we bear the name of a man who pursued standards of excellence.

I despise mediocrity, no matter how high grade that mediocrity may be, because the Lord whom we love and whom we're meant to serve is always calling out the better side of our nature, is always challenging us to be better than we've been. And I covet that sort of thing for this congregation. I hope the day will never come when people can say we are a mediocre family in God. I hope the day will always be around when people will say we're above the average, we are not mediocre, that we do pursue standards of excellence, because our Lord deserves it.

I should also tell you this about Luke, that what he passed on to other people was something that he himself first received. What a tribute to those who gave it to him. It was something in the testimony of Jesus Christ as they passed it on to him that was tremendously valid, and so very much alive, that it made a dent upon the fabric of his soul. He took it seriously.

But I should also tell you this, that he just didn't pass it on as he got it. It became crystallized in his own experience, it became part of the very fabric of his own being. And there's a word that Luke would give to us, I'm reasonably certain -- "treat in a very genuine way what you have received."

You know, don't you, that what you and I know about Jesus Christ we know because other people told us. None of us ever figured it out by himself and by himself alone. Sometimes when I have assignments to go out in the tradition of the Church as an evangelist, I look at a congregation as I'm looking at you, and I simply don't see a sea of faces but I see individual faces. And sometimes I make bold to say when I look at you I see three images . . .

-- I see you yourself as you are right now, of course I do
-- but then I like to think that in my mind's eye I see the face of the person who first told you about Jesus Christ, because that's true for all of us -- we never figured it out by ourselves....
-- and then I'd like to think I see the face of a third person who represents all the other people that you will tell about Jesus Christ....

So what Luke passed on to us he passed on as he had received it, but as crystalized by his own experience.

I've told you before, haven't I, about John Wesley, who was Christian alright, so much so that he came all the way to America to help evangelize the Indians down in Georgia. But he never quite pulled it off. And going back to England, heart-sick because he was a failure in the name of Christ, when he encountered these Moravians who talked with him quietly and earnestly about their own experience of Jesus Christ. And then it dawned on John Wesley, as in 1738, in the latter part of May, at a quarter-to-nine in Aldersgate Street Mission in London, when, he said, "I felt my heart strangely warmed." It has to happen that way for each one of us.

When I began my ministry, I read the works of an author who said, back there in the late 30's and the early 40's -- that the besetting sin of the Christian church at that time was that we were living off the religious capital of our

parents, and we aren't making enough investment in our own name. You can't go on forever drawing on the religious capital of other people. Luke represents those who, having received, crystalized it in his own experience and then was able to say, as he passed it on to others, "This I know to be true."

I should also tell you that when you read the Gospel according to Luke, you're reading perhaps the most beautiful of all the Gospel records....I should also tell you that when you read the Gospel according to Luke, the book that bears his name, you're reading the book, according to Bible scholars, that has the element of praise in it, more so than the rest of the New Testament put together. And if Luke were here I'd like to think that this is what he would say to us: "You who bear my name, always be a people who love to praise the Lord." And I covet for this congregation, as you well know, and as I told you last Sunday, that we would always be a people who were characterized by giving praise, not only with their lips but also with their deeds, to Almighty God.

One of the finest things I heard said about you was by a person who first came to this church as a stranger. It was after the second morning service...he walked the corridor, he didn't quite know when the third service was. He came as the 9:45 congregation was leaving. I should be happy just if he could have said the same thing about you. He said, "As I came I felt that I was among people who are alive in the Lord -- you can tell it by looking at them, and the way they walk, and the way they talk." When you read Luke, you read the record of the man who praised the Lord and King of Salvation. May we always be a congregation that reflects the praise that's due the Lord Jesus Christ.

I should also tell you this -- when you read the Gospel according to Luke, you are reading a treatise or an account that emphasises prayer in no uncertain way. And this, too, I covet for this congregation, that we should be a people at prayer. One of the finest things to be said about Saint Luke Church is that it has the Prayer Partners. No day ever comes nor goes, the sun never rises nor

sets, without our having the assurance that every household is remembered daily in prayer.

This is that man Luke for us. What's in a name? Well it all depends, my friend, on what you want to make of it. I can only bear testimony to him as I know him. I'm glad we have the name, the name of a great and good man, the beloved physician. And that's where I need to pause before I conclude -- a physician. It's been said that a lawyer sees men at their worst....a pastor sees them at their best.....a physician, just as they are. And Luke, the writer of the record, saw people just as they are -- stained by sin, but with a Saviour who sacrificed His life for them -- every single one of them. And that's why the symbol for Luke is a calf, the sacrificial animal. We must never forget this.

What's in a name? The question is: What will you make of the name you bear as we face another year?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"MAN-WITH-THE-BOOK"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Luke 4:17

On this Reformation Sunday the sermon bears the title: "Man-With-The-Book"
and the text is from the 4th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And he went into the synagogue, as his
custom was, and there was handed to him
the book . . ."

Tell me, if you were commissioned to do a painting of Jesus Christ, aside from choosing the Incarnation, his birth in Bethlehem, or His death on that lonely hill outside Jerusalem, what would be the subject pose that you would choose? Here in Saint Luke when you come to worship on any given Sunday morning, you may look around you and see in stained glass some artists' interpretation of some facet or episode in the life of Jesus Christ. In all likelihood, whatever your subject might be, I am reasonably certain that you would not choose one that I highly commend to you now: whenever you think of Jesus Christ, you ought to think of Him as the Man-with-the-book. And that's why I'm asking you to visualize as best you can that time when He went back to His home town.

He had been an apprentice in the carpenter's shop, and now, having been abroad for a while -- that is, wandering here and there in Judea and Galilee -- He came back to Nazareth, and as was His custom, He went to the place of meeting, He went to the synagogue.

People who gather in a synagogue do not gather as quietly as you people gather. There's quite a bit of excitement and hustle and bustle, restlessness and endless chatter and conversation. A little bit more so that time, because now they were watching the elder, the man in charge of the synagogue, and he seemed to be pointing to someone....and they were craning their necks or strain-

ing their eyes - - "Who is it?" . . . and then the word was like wild-fire --
"Why, it's Joseph's son -- remember him! He came to our house one day and
delivered the yoke for the oxen!" - or - "I saw him at your place, bringing
the lintel or the threshold for your house! Sure, you know him! Now they're
going to ask him to read . . . " And all eyes were focused upon Him as He
took in His hands the sacred writings.

Now you ought to look that in your minds eye. That's a very important
chapter in the life of Jesus Christ, for it was then and there as he read from
the prophecy of Isaiah, in which Isaiah talks about God's blue-print for this
world, the kind of people we ought to be, and the kind of thing we ought to be
doing - - - Jesus Christ startled those people. And with the book in His hand
He says, "Today, I tell you that this prophecy is going to be fulfilled." - -
and through Him, of course.

You can't think of Jesus Christ properly without thinking of Him as the
Man-with-the-book. Will I surprise you if I remind you again, as I have done
on other occasions, that at every significant crossroads in history you will
find the man-with-the-book -- there are those who alter the course of history...

...Charles Darwin did: the man-with-the-book -- "The Origin
of the Species"

...Augustine helped to alter the course of the early church --
he's the man-with-the-book -- "The City of God"

...when the church began to spread from place to place in
the Mediterranean world, it's a tent-mender-turned-preacher
and the man-with-the-book, the Apostle Paul

...Karl Marx has altered the course of history as the man-
with-the-book -- "Das Kapital"

...Adolph Hitler altered the course of history, the man-with-
the-book - - "Mein Kampf"

A few short years ago an essayist in TIME magazine dealt with a feature article on a man who happened to be Martin Luther, and he said of Martin Luther this kind of thing: "There are very few people who have altered the course of history - - - three who did: Jesus Christ - Karl Marx - Martin Luther . . ." And I make bold to suggest to you that whenever you think of Martin Luther, you think of him as the man-with-the-book.

When I was a student at Gettysburg Seminary, a product of a Depression generation, we were somewhat thrilled to hear the President of the Seminary announce that the Seminary had received a very munificent bequest. Right now I can't tell you whether it was \$20,000 or \$200,000 -- it was big in our eyes. And we were excited.

We were especially pleased to learn that much of that sum would be set aside for scholarship aid, for practically every student on the campus was there because of a scholarship. And then they also told us that a certain portion would be set aside for the erecting of a Luther statue on the campus of Gettysburg Seminary. And you can see it now when you go on Seminary Ridge -- they've erected it, it's between the Old Dorm and the Chapel.

Now here again I'd ask the question: suppose you were on the committee -- how shall we picture Martin Luther? Well, in the theme of this sermon, they did it wisely, they portrayed him as the man-with-the-book -- but what book? That's a good question. It could be any one of several books....

...it could be the Catechism, because Martin Luther gave us the Catechism, you know, out of that pastoral concern that he had for people. It is one of the greatest things we have going for us in the Lutheran Church, are you aware of that! -- this handbook of the Faith, this questions-and-answers that deal with the basic tenets of the Christian

religion -- he authored that. Well, it could be Martin Luther with the Catechism in his hand, the book....

...it could be Martin Luther with a hymn-book in his hands -- to all intents and purposes recognize him as the Father-of-congregational-singing! Surely you were moved when we sang two of his hymns this morning already. So it could be the man-with-the-book, the hymn-book....

Of course it's the Book, the Bible.

Whenever you think of Martin Luther, think of him in this regard, as a man who had a high and holy respect for the sacred writings. He said something that in my judgment is exceedingly precious regarding the Scriptures, I don't know that I've ever heard it said better. He said, "The Bible is the cradle of Christ" -- which is his way of saying to us: "It's in and through the Scriptures that we find Jesus Christ -- it's the Scriptures that lead us to Jesus Christ, and this he could say out of the thinking that was crystalized in his own experience.

Would I surprise you if I were to tell you that Martin Luther is the man who said at one time, "I think I hate God!" -- that was before he studied the Scriptures carefully, and particularly the Epistle to the Romans and the Galatians. He recognized himself as a sinner. He couldn't possibly think how he could ever be made right in God's sight. He couldn't possibly think of living long enough to chalk up to his credit all the good things that the Roman Catholic Church in that day insisted that were essential. And when he thought of himself in the hands of an angry God, he didn't see how he could love Him.

He wrestled with this. He had a mentor in the faith, John Staupich, bless his soul, who patiently dealt with him, and with the warmth of his personality he persuaded him to read the Scriptures. And as Martin Luther dealt with the Scriptures he came upon two great truths: Only by faith in what Jesus Christ has done for us can a man be made free and enjoy the blessings of salvation -- this truth

became real to him as he read the Scriptures.....so much so that later on he could say, "As far as the teachings of the Church are concerned, I will acknowledge them sola Scriptura"-- only as they are based upon what the Bible says.

I don't know that I particularly like it, but sometimes they refer to Geneva, that grand and glorious city, as the 'Protestant Rome' -- for the World Council of Churches has its headquarters there, and much of the Protestant movement has related to that great city. In Geneva you can find a monument to a movement, and there are the figures, the great Reformers, who were part of that whole great movement within the Church known as the Reformation. But you can't possibly think of the movement without the men who made it possible. And at every great moment, when the course of history is being altered, remember -- there's going to be the man-with-the-book!

How fortunate for us, we enjoy the blessings of a man who held in his hands the sacred writings. When Sir Walter Scott was breathing his last, this lover of many books, whose library had one shelf after another heavily laden with books, he said, with a halting breath, to his valet - - "Bring me the Book." ...and the valet said, "What book, sir? Your library is filled with many books." Said Sir Walter - - "There is only one Book -- the Bible."

We give thanks today on this Festival of the Reformation for the blessings that we enjoy and the man who altered the course of history as he was rooted, grounded in the Scriptures.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"OF SAINTS AND SINNERS"

GRACE, Mercy and peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

*Raymond 3.23
Matthew 5.48*

It was on that mission for the Church a number of years ago when I winged my way around the world. I had limped a bit in India, and then when I went to that tiny kingdom of Nepal, I realized that I should no longer put off seeing a physician. Our host in Kathmandu arranged for the doctor at the mission hospital to see me. I had felt, as I crossed the threshold of that hospital, that I was walking death.....and as he looked at me he simply said, "You're sick."

Would you believe it, that I was much relieved, to have it called by name, and to believe that perhaps here was a man who might be able to do something about it. And that's precisely what he did.

In G. Bernard Shaw's "Dr. Cannock" there's a line that goes something like this: "If you say that you are well, it is only because you do not know that you are sick."

Now tell me, what is your answer to this question which I am constrained to put to you without further delay: When do you feel most like paying your physician's bill -- when you have gone to him for a thorough physical examination, and having concluded he looks you straight in the eye and says, "You're in good shape! I don't find anything wrong" . . . or would you feel most like paying your bill if, when he gave you a thorough examination, he said, "I think we can get it just in time!" -- for in all of his probing and in all of his testing he has discovered something now that must be corrected. It can no longer be put off, and you were quite unaware of it. Now honestly, when would you feel most like paying your bill?

When it's all said and done, and if there's something that needs to be cor-

rected, it ought to be called by its rightful name. If there's something that needs to be corrected, it ought not to be delayed and treatment should begin immediately.

Why do I introduce this sermon in this manner, a sermon that bears the title, "Of Saints And Sinners"? For the simple reason that it's the business of the church to call the situation exactly as it is and to define the predicament of man precisely as it is. The word sin very properly remains in the vocabulary of the Christian Church, because it's the business of the church to tell people that they are sinners. I have some friends who make light of this, and they ridicule the church -- they even take the church to task and say, "You create all kinds of unhealthy guilt feelings in people -- you do them a disservice by constantly reminding them that they are sinners." I hasten to say that my physician friend in that mission hospital in Kathmandu might have done me a disservice if having looked at me, all he could say and do would be -- "You're sick" -- but he exuded confidence because he spoke to me authoritatively, and then immediately decided to do something about it that helped to correct the situation. And my debt to him remains very, very great.

There are some people who take the church to task, and we Lutherans in particular, because when we come together for a worship experience as we have done today and are doing, no sooner do we get you within these walls and we have you standing on your feet (and if we had kneelers in the pews we'd probably get you on your knees)...and have you use such words as these: "We poor sinners confess unto Thee that we are by nature sinful and unclean." We hardly get you together than when we put those words upon your lips -- the very same words that we put on your lips last Sunday -- and as you plan to come back next Lord's Day you might as well accept the fact, we're going to begin in much the same way. And I have no patience whatsoever -- and I say this to you with all the strength of my conviction after preaching the Gospel for almost four decades -- I have no patience with

people who would make the Confession an option in the Order for Worship. For you see, we are the same people who were here last week, and no sooner do we have our sins forgiven than some of us found ourselves thinking evil thoughts and perpetrating some measure of wickedness in behalf of other people -- honestly we do! We are stained by original sin.

There is always the inclination toward evil. You want proof positive? You can give it to me as a testimony out of your own experience. Aren't you numbered among those who admits that it's easier to be bad than it is to be good -- honestly now! With no trouble at all, I can dislike any number of people that I know -- they irritate me, they annoy me. It takes a bit of effort to be good to them, to be kind to them, and to help them....and as a Christian, as one who is endeavoring, no matter how falteringly to be my Master's obedient servant - - it takes a bit of doing to be compassionate and to try to understand their situation. It's a lot easier to ignore them - - it's even quite easy to hurt them, and to keep them exactly where they are. It takes a bit of effort to treat them in a Christ-like manner. Who doesn't understand this? Quite honestly, it takes a bit of doing to be good. It doesn't require much effort to be bad.

That's why the church very properly, in some of the responses that it exacts from you people and from all of us, when a vow was being taken, we now ask you to respond not simply by saying 'yes' as you give some indication of your faithfulness.....but we ask you to respond in this manner: "Yes, by the help of God."

It was Martin Luther who interpreted for us the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. In that magnificent way in which he explains the Doctrine of the Trinity, the third article of the Creed, it's the Holy Spirit that enables us to be good, it's the Holy Spirit who fortifies, it's the Holy Spirit that enlightens us, it's the Holy Spirit that encourages us.

I smiled broadly the last time it happened, and inwardly so, I suppose I ought to add, when I was discussing the marriage service that we use here in

Saint Luke with a couple who came to see me. And very honestly one of them said, "When you ask us to be faithful to one another" -- (and as they exchange their vows) -- "could we simply say 'yes' instead of saying 'yes, by the help of God'?" Quite candidly, this chap admitted that he didn't think that God had much to do with his relationship with this woman and as the future would unfold. And after being married for thirty-eight years I smiled inwardly because I have come to know that I need God's help to be all that God wants me to be to the woman that I married. I can't do it on my own. And that's why I'm so happy when we see the marriage service itself within the context of the Christian Church, because all of us who are Christians are helping people to be faithful and devoted.

That's why, if you've attended a marriage service recently in Saint Luke Church within the last several years, we say to all the people who are present: "Will you who are present do all in your power to help and support this marriage in the years that are ahead? If so, answer, 'We will.'" We need all of the help that we can get to be good, to be better than we are.

At the next service we will be baptizing a child, and after the last morning service we'll be baptizing two children in the Chapel of the Grateful Heart. Baptism itself must also be seen within the context of the church, for a child is being brought into the Family of God, and that means all of us are involved with the life of that child.....if only as a Christian, unknown to that child being named for God today, if only as an individual Christian, to live the kind of a life that does not become a stumbling block to that child's Christian growth.

Gilbert K. Chesterton used to say that he couldn't quite understand why the church had so much trouble trying to get people to believe in the doctrine of original sin, because of all the sins that's the one that becomes so easily evident. With the Apostle Paul we can say, "The good that I want to do I don't do, and the evil that I don't want to do, I do." Who doesn't understand what I'm saying?

This sermon today has twin texts -- not just one text today, but two texts,

and upon reflection I dare say that neither one of them will make you very happy. Here they are -- from the third chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, the 23rd verse, Paul says:

"We have all sinned and come short
of the glory of God . . ."

...every single one of us.

The second text, the words of our Lord, recorded in the 5th chapter of Matthew, the 48th verse:

"Be ye perfect, even as your Father
in Heaven is perfect."

....now which is it, my friend -- saint or sinner? Who am I? One or the other?

According to good basic Lutheran theology, I'm both, and at the same time. But thanks be to God by what He's done for me in Jesus Christ, despite my sinful nature and while I am yet a sinner, He claims me and makes me right in the sight of my Heavenly Father. I am a sinner, and I will be a sinner until the day that I die.

But there are two kinds of sinners: those who sin and don't much care, and those who sin and care a lot and want to be better, and know that they can't be better on their own. They cry out to God for mercy.

In the Book of Discipline in the Methodist Church there's a very interesting question. When the candidate for ordination appears before the bishop, the bishop is in duty bound to put this question to him: "Are you striving after perfection?" And once I met a candidate of the Methodist Church who had this question put to him, and he said, "The bishop was a very understanding person. In a whimsical sort of fashion he looked at me and he said, 'Maybe you think that question is irrelevant, and for me to ask you if you're striving after perfection. And if you're inclined to think light of it, then let me ask you this question: If you're not striving after perfection, what is it that you're striving after?'" Jesus Christ says that we're meant to be better than we are, and by His help we can work toward that end.

The word perfect comes from the Greek word telos(?), which means the end, the kind of thing that we were meant to become as we mature. Christians are meant to be Godlike, to reflect the mind, the mood, the spirit and the life of Jesus Christ, and toward that end we're meant to strive.

In the New Testament, said someone, the term sinner and saint are not opposite - - they overlap almost completely. A sinner is not a person irredeemably alienated from God.....a saint is not a person of almost superhuman purity and excellence. In biblical thought we are all sinners: that is, each of us is afflicted with a tendency to put self at the centre of things and to push God and other persons to the edges of life. And in biblical thought a saint is a sinner, an ordinary sinner, who by his commitment to God is striving to do something about his sin, striving to overcome his self-centredness.

Saintliness is not a static condition of personal excellence: it is rather, a steady struggle against the forces of sin in one's life. In the New Testament the mark of the saint is not achievement, it is not perfection, it is commitment, it is consecration. The exceedingly precious thought of the Christian Church is this: branding us sinners the Christian Church says to us - - But you don't have to stay in that situation. Your predicament can be met by the grace of God, and you can be made right in His favor -- not because of any merit of yours, but because of what's been done for you in Christ Jesus.

Today, very shortly, you'll hear their names spoken with reverence and respect by the Associate Pastor as you remember those of our parish family who have been translated into God's nearer presence since last All Saints' Day. We have reason to believe that they're encircled by the eternal love of God, and for some of us who knew them and knew them well, they had feet of clay.....but they also had halos. And some of those halos sometimes would fall to the ground, but they always reached for them, and they wanted them back where they belonged . . .

" . . . at Robert Browning's funeral in Westminster Abbey, Sir Edward Burne-Jones said, 'I would have given something for a banner or two and much more I would have given if a chorister had come out and rent the air with a trumpet' . . . what finer tribute could be given to one who in the time of death could be remembered as having mastered the art of living triumphantly? . . . "

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"CERTAIN PEOPLE: PRIME WITNESS"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

John 9

It happens every now and then, an experience undoubtedly in which you share, when you recall some saying of your father of blessed memory. It happens sometimes in the strangest moments, when I hear him saying something that he said repeatedly. There was this saying of my father in particular that I so frequently remember: "Raymond, a person either has it, or he doesn't." That's the way he would catalog people -- they either represented integrity, or they didn't.

-- they were either pleasing in their personality...or they weren't

-- they could do a job....or they couldn't do a job

-----he had little patience with varying degrees of gray -- it
was either one, or the other....

A person either has it....or he doesn't.

The thought came quickly to mind again as I dealt with the final phases of the preparation of this sermon. The sermon is an introductory one in the series with which we will be dealing for the most part between now and next spring, the series that deals with certain people who were encountered by Jesus Christ, and the kind of thing that resulted because Jesus Christ came into their lives. We'll be able to see Him in a perspective that otherwise perhaps we don't always recognize.

Let me give you a very simple homespun illustration: a number of years ago I told Winifred at the close of the last service that if it was possible I was going to bring several guests home for dinner. What made that as a possibility was the simple fact that as I looked over the congregation I recognized there the husband and the father, the son and the daughter of one of our members who had

been hospitalized. None of you knows the family, so without any hesitation I can tell you there was a great deal of stress and strain in that family at that particular time. So we had dinner together.

On Tuesday of that week there came a letter from the daughter containing a kind of information the like of which I had not seen before, nor had I thought of it before. In that letter the daughter said, "Thank you for having us for Sunday dinner. It was only as I heard my father being engaged in conversation with you that I got a perspective of him that I had never had before. It was one thing for me to talk with him, it was one thing for my brother to talk with him. It was another thing for me to hear the conversation that took place between him and my mother. But then, as you engaged him in conversation, certain things began to surface which I had never seen before."

I presume it's in that spirit that as these Sundays progress we may be able to see Jesus Christ in a perspective we had not seen before, as He engaged and encountered certain people, and the kind of thing that remains as the net result.

Today, in this introductory sermon, it's about a man who occupies most of the attention that's given to any one character in the 9th chapter of the Gospel according to John. You ought to be impressed with the fact that all 41 verses, a sizeable chunk of space in that Gospel, is given over to this character. What can I tell you about him?

Well, I can tell you he was born blind.

I can also tell you that as soon as some people saw him and saw Jesus Christ, they talked to Jesus Christ about this man and his predicament. And they began arguing, and they began wondering why it was that he happened to be the way he was. And then because they happened to be the kind of people they were, they said, "Who committed the sin?" - - they looked upon his affliction as a sign of punishment, and they had a field day.

And then I presume, as I picture it in my mind's eye, Jesus Christ rising to His full stature said, "Enough of this! You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!" - - - I'm trying to picture it as it occurred, as I understand the mind and spirit of Christ - - -

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves.

You're badgering this man...you're thoroughly enjoying yourselves because you think you'll point the finger of condemnation at someone, and you're doing it gleefully - - the man's blind! Let's do something about it!"

And so Jesus Christ performed the miracle -- dramatically so....He put spittle on the man's eyes, and the man was able to see. Wonderful, wouldn't you say? and yet they really gave him a rough time. He was the chap, you know, who gets practically all the attention in that 9th chapter of the Fourth Gospel -- born blind, Jesus gave him sight. That was it. That was exactly it. But a bunch of people, most of whom, if not all of them, should have been able to recognize a miracle by name and call it as such, downright refused to do so. And the poor fellow -- God be praised nonetheless, all he could say was, "One thing I know: once I was blind....now I see."

He didn't argue. He didn't preach. He didn't have to. He was the prime witness. Once he was blind....now, he says, "I see." The fellow had it, you see, and he knew it. And no matter how they argued with him, he didn't argue back. He said, "I see." What a marvelous miracle.

He's the one, you know, who when other people would talk about 'What a perfectly beautiful blue sky!' - - he had never seen a blue sky.....when someone would talk about the delicate nature and quality of the lily of the field -- he had never seen a lily of the field. He had never been able to look into the eyes of a friend and read the tender lines of compassion. But now he could! And above all else he was able to look into the face of Jesus Christ

and see a friend - - see God-become-real-to-him. And some of us know what that's like! because we have had the great joy of looking into the faces of certain people, and while we may not say it aloud, we have reverently whispered the name of God as we've seen God become real to us through people. And if that can be true as we look into the face of a human being, how much more so shall it become real when we think of spiritual vision. For every single one of us is blind, honestly now, blind to my own sin. That's why I'm thankful when some of you go to such great effort to point my sins out to me -- we're blind to our own sinning....we're blind to the needs of other people....we're blind to the love of God....we're blind to the fact that the purposes of God are meant to be fulfilled in our lives! Then some day, somehow, we can have an encounter with Jesus Christ, and our blindness can be taken away by the miracle of His grace. It can happen. It does happen. And when it happens, a person knows it. You either have it . . . or you don't.

I keep close to my study chair a paper-back written by D. R. Davies, a man who at 49 years of age had been around quite a bit. He had been a Marxist...he had been a socialist....his professional career had gone to pieces....his preaching was a failure....his marriage ended on the rocks. And so one night he attempted suicide. But he had an encounter with Jesus Christ. Let me read for you the words that he wrote:

"Now I had a first-hand experience with the power of Christ, a first-hand knowledge of God. For that experience I had to pay a great price in terms of human frustration, defeat and suffering. But the pearl was mine. Now I had a faith that could stand up to any disaster time could bring. I was able to do the one essential of the ministerial calling - - namely, to witness to the redeeming power of Jesus Christ. Now I felt I could take any place on the witness stand and say, "Yes, this is true -- Christ can and does save men from despair and gloom -- He's done it for me. Amid all the complexity and confusion of our time I am forever sure of the redeeming power of God in Christ. Though all the world would unite in denying this, I should still be certain. This one thing I know -- whereas I was blind - - now I see!"

In company with many of you who are tourists and go to England, I always delight, if at all possible, in going to Hyde Park, and to go there on a Saturday night or a Sunday afternoon when the people come out to take their soap-boxes and to stand up and make their speeches.....and always to be surrounded by a bunch of hecklers. No matter what a man says, no matter what he's talking about, there are always there those who try to tear it to bits.

Well, one time there was a man standing there talking about Jesus Christ, and he referred to Him as the miracle-worker...and he cited one miracle after another, and concluded with the miracle of the Loaves and the Fishes. And then the hecklers started in. One in particular tore him to shreds and made light of all that he had to say. And from the edge of the crowd a nondescript character comes forward, and with an air of conviction he said: "I don't know anything about this Jesus Christ that took bread and multiplied it and fed a multitude -- I don't know anything about that Christ. But let me tell you about the Christ that I know about - - I was a drunkard and a poor father, and a no-good husband. But then I had an encounter with Jesus Christ. I don't know anything about walking on the water....I don't know anything about taking a couple of loaves of bread and a couple of fish and multiply it so that you can feed 5,000 people. But I'll tell you what I do know - - in my life He worked a miracle. He took beer and whiskey and transformed it into bread...and clothing...and furniture. Jesus Christ did that for me!"

You turn the pages of the New Testament -- it's filled with that kind of thing . . .

-- the rascal who had been a tax collector, defrauding
people.....and Zacchaeus says, "I'm a new man since
Jesus Christ came into my life!"

-- Mary, the prostitute -- "I know the kind of life I've

lived....but then I had an encounter with Jesus Christ,
and now I know what it is to be a pure woman!"

It happens again and again, and always it's the same - - I know! from my own experience!

There was a time in my life when I wanted to be a lawyer. I am still fascinated by court trials. I sit on the edge of my seat, figuratively speaking, when I hear the call for the next witness, and I see the person come forward and go to the witness stand - - all by himself....when the time comes for him to bear his testimony -- he's the authority in the case, as long as he can speak out of his own experience. It's not what's hearsay, now, but when he can say: "I saw with my own eyes I heard with my own ears I was there"

....down through the corridors of time, the echo of
the Eternal Voice, again and ever so often, calling
for you and for me: "Next witness, please."

....now you think about that!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"CERTAIN PEOPLE: THE FORGIVEN ONE"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son, Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

huh 7-

There were three of them. About whom would you rather have me speak first?
Maybe I'd better tell you who they were.

One - - there was the host, the man who gave the dinner party, who invited
people to come.....

...then there was the woman, quite a gal indeed, who
crashed the party and made quite a scene...

...or, I can begin to tell you something about
the one who was presumably the invited guest.....

....which one do you want to hear about first?

Well, let me proceed if you don't mind, and tell you where I think we
ought to begin. Let's begin with the host. You can read all about this, inci-
dentally, in the 7th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. I'll be reminding
you of that.

The host was a man named Simon, sometimes referred to as Simon-the-Pharisee,
sometimes referred to as Simon-the-Leper. I suppose he was called Simon-the-
Leper because at one time he had a cancerous spot on his cheek, right or left,
it doesn't make any difference -- it may have been arrested, but he never had
done with the label. He was called Simon-the-Pharisee because that's exactly
what he was, a student of the law, a professed religionist, and regarded as
such.

And one day somebody came to him -- let's put it that way -- and said:
"Simon, what do you think about the new preacher that's come to town?" Now Simon-
the-Pharisee was a very gracious person, he wasn't about to commit himself, and

he didn't answer at once. He perhaps really didn't know. He'd been aware of the fact that Jesus had been attracting people, he had heard about some of the miracles he had performed. But he wasn't about to make a formal statement. But, being a very clever chap, it could well be that Simon-the-Pharisee said to the person who made the inquiry: "I don't know, but I'll tell you what I'm going to do -- I think I'll have him over for supper one of these nights, and when I have him for supper I'll put some questions to him, I'll size him up. I'll have him pretty much to myself, perhaps, for a kind of private conversation, and then I'll know where he's coming from and what he's up to. And if you want me to give you my opinion, you come back afterward and I'll tell you what I think of him" . . . well, it could have been that way. You can read all about it for yourself in the 7th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. So let's begin with the man who gave the party.

Now let's talk about the gal who crashed the party. And it created quite a tizzy. It was quite dramatically done. The Bible refers to her....and I should also tell you that this incident was so important that you'll find it recorded by every single Gospel writer. None of them could keep it out of his book.

One of the Gospel writers refers to her as "a woman of the city." That's just another way of saying she was a woman of the streets, had a very unsavory reputation. In our modern novels we'd have a four-letter word for her, of course we would. Well, she heard about this party being given, and she crashed the party.

It could happen very easily. Whenever anybody heard that a party was being given, most of the people in that area would do their best to crash it if they could, and they got away with it. When she got inside the gate she was instinctively drawn to Jesus Christ, the guest, the man that Simon-the-Pharisee had especially invited. And that's when it all happened. She just couldn't

control herself.

She began to cry -- tears of joy, no less -- and as she was shedding those tears she used them to wash the feet of Jesus, allowing her long tresses from her hair to serve as a kind of towel.

The people couldn't quite understand what was going on, and they were embarrassed, especially the host, for they knew exactly who she was and the kind of woman she was. And they couldn't quite understand why Jesus Christ would allow this to happen -- "If, now, he's supposed to be the kind of person we think he is -- ".....that's the way they reasoned.

Now if you don't mind I'm going to help you as best I can to get this in better perspective and clearer focus. This kind of thing did happen, you know. And it could happen again. Let me help you.....

...suppose I heard that a distinguished preacher had come to the metropolitan area and had been preaching in the District of Columbia and had performed his stint, and I'd say to him, "Now before you go to Kansas City, why don't you come out to Silver Spring and we'll arrange for a service for you in Saint Luke Church."

(I ought to say to you that he had done some preaching in the neighborhood of Thomas Circle, down there at 14th Street, and he had walked those streets and he had talked to some of the people)

...so now we invite him to come out here, this distinguished preacher, don't forget, and

as he's preaching somebody comes in -- maybe hadn't gotten here on time as you did....but as she crosses the threshold she looks up in the pulpit and she sees this preacher.....she comes right up to him, embraces him, hugs him -- in front of everybody. And some of us who have driven around Thomas Circle recognize her type, because as our cars were waiting and idling for the light to change,

haven't we been approached? We know exactly the kind she is.

You can imagine the tizzy that would be created here. We couldn't understand it -- what about this preacher? How did he get a relationship with somebody like that? There may be more here than meets the eye....that's the way they reasoned and in all likelihood Simon did his best to get his servants to hustle her back out in the streets again. But before she went out she happened to look back at Jesus, and she heard what He was saying. He was speaking now to the host, He was speaking to Simon. And I suppose Jesus said to him -- permit me to paraphrase it this way --

"Simon, let me tell you something. You don't understand what's going on, do you? You can't appreciate this. Well, Simon, when I came to your house you really weren't honoring me. It was your curiosity that got the better of you, that's why you invited me to come! If you had any feeling for me, if you wanted to give me the regard that belongs to a guest, you'd have done what custom in the East here dictates -- you'd have seen that my feet were bathed....you would have done that! But you didn't! And she came in, and she did it....."

And then, while it's not in the record, wouldn't it have been wonderful if Jesus would have said, "I want you to hear her side of the story, Simon, before you come to a conclusion." And suppose Jesus would have done it that way.

Or suppose you and I would say to her across the centuries: "Tell us, how did you get to know Him? And why did you have to put on this kind of a display, shockingly so?" Give her a chance to speak, and maybe this is what she would have said . . .

"Well, I know what I am. And one day when I was walking down the street, and I saw Him coming in my direction -- "

(let me put it for you this way)

" . . . and my first thought was 'my next customer' . . . but when He came to me He looked me straight in the eyes as nobody else has ever looked into my eyes, and I felt as though He were searching into the very depth of my soul. And then I saw myself through His eyes for what I am, and I hated it! But mind you, as he looked at me there was a look of compassion in His eyes, there was warmth, and He saw me as a person ... not simply for what I am and what I have been, but also for what I could become. And all of a sudden, having hated myself for what I am, I also got a glimpse through His eyes of what I could become. Nobody had ever done that for me before....nobody had ever done that for me before! The man who picked me up the night before ignored me the next morning....and all men turned to me for what they could take. I had a feeling when He looked into my eyes that He was looking into my eyes for what He could give me, and I've never been treated like that before. And so much so that I can honestly tell you that when I looked into His eyes, and He looked into mine, I felt as though it was God himself!"

...she couldn't have been more correct.

"Now, Simon, you've heard her story. This is how it happened. And she's crashed this party now because she had to show me her gratitude -- she's overcome with joy that the past can be put behind her, and the glorious future can begin to unfold. She doesn't have to be as once she was. There's a new world, and Simon, I've opened that door for her to that new world. Nobody else ever did it before." And then also, before they hustled her back to the streets again, she heard Jesus tell Simon: "Simon, I want to tell you something else --

"Once there were two men. They had something in common. Each owed a debt, the one not as much as the other. But then something happened --

both men were forgiven their debts. Now, which one, Simon, do you think was the more thankful?"

Simon had to answer, "Why of course, the man who was forgiven much, -- he was the most thankful."

And then Jesus drove His point home hard, as He drove that point home He said, "Simon, you don't know what it is to be forgiven. You don't have any joy in your heart. You haven't asked to be forgiven -- you're perfectly satisfied with the way you are!"

And that's the curse that comes upon many of us - - we're decent, we are respectable, and we don't very often ask God to have mercy upon us. And some of us are/^{not}very eager to much change the way we have been living. But in the sight of God the change always ought to set in, and it can't set in without His help and without His favor....and without our having been encountered by Him.

I'm very happy that I belong to a church that encourages its people each time they cross the threshold to begin at the same point at which they began the last time they were here: "We poor sinners confess unto Thee that we are by nature sinful and unclean - - " The one thing we want more than anything else is to be forgiven. And once we know we're forgiven, we can have the peace of God that passeth all understanding.....the person who leaves this service now with a spring in his step and a light in his eye, the person who can face the future in the knowledge that the sins of the past are forgiven, and the God who forgives those sins will help him, no matter how falteringly he may go, to a better tomorrow. This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"MARY, MOST HONORED ONE"
(Luke 1:38)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

If you don't mind, I would like to offer you a suggestion, that when the text is read this morning, that you read it not simply in the light of what you hear, but you read it in the light of what might have been said. The text represents the words of Mary, the mother of our Blessed Lord, when she was told of the special assignment that God had in mind for her. Now this was her response -- but as you hear it, now keep in mind not what she said, but what she might have said . . .

" . . . And Mary said, Behold, I am the hand-maid
of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your
word . . . "

Now this is what she might have said:

-- "Not me, God! You're mistaken, aren't you? I don't deserve such consideration, I'm not worthy -- I can't possibly measure up to what you have in mind. And furthermore, I don't think that I want it. The risk is too great! Upon reflection, I know exactly what I'm getting into. You want me to do what you have in mind? Not me, God! You'd better point your finger at somebody else. Don't count on me!"

....that's what she might have said.....because I've known people who have talked that way to God, if not with their words, then certainly with their thoughts, as God has seen fit to point His finger at them and say, "This time it's you that I need for a special assignment."

Or if she had not replied that way, she might have said:

-- "I don't understand it, God, it doesn't make sense to me. Would you mind going over it again -- now this time step by step. I'm this kind of a person, God, you know that, that if I'm going to do something, I've got to know where it's going to end as well, and how I'm going to get there in the meantime. Now, let's go over it again, God. It doesn't make sense to me. What! -- you tell me, God, you're not about to reveal it all to me -- that I'm to act in faith? -- that I'm to trust you, step by step, when the

darkness sets in and the way seems uncertain! Not me, God. I'm not that kind of a person. I've got to have everything packaged up neatly, I've got to have it signed, sealed and delivered -- I've got to understand the meaning of the fine print --- I've got to be able to understand the nuances and the subtleties. I can't help it, God, that's the way I am . . . "

...that's how she might have answered.

Or this, too, she might have said:

"God, to me the whole idea seems ridiculous. I'm not sure you can get me to believe it, and if you can't get me to believe it, how about all these other people who are going to become involved? How can I trust Joseph's reaction -- the man who's claimed me? But suppose it doesn't make sense to him!

...and all the people in my home town -- you know what people are like in the village, God. You know what they can say and what they can think can be far more damaging than the truth itself...

O no, God, you're not going to get me into this thing. It's ridiculous...."

...that's what she might have said. . . . for the simple reason that that's the way some people I've known have responded to God. For what He offers to them just doesn't make sense from the human perspective. And certainly the birth of Jesus Christ by a virgin didn't make sense to a lot of people in that day....and doesn't to a lot of people in our day, and that's why they've given up, they rejected some of the Creed--- they'll accept a lot of other things, but they don't buy that!

If you want to test the validity of what's said, you always cast it against the background of what might have been said, and that's the way Mary might have answered. But she didn't. "And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the hand-maid of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.'"

....to all intents and purposes this is Mary saying, "I shall be your obedient servant, Lord, I'll commit myself into your keeping. I'll trust you."

Did it ever occur to you that that's the way it's got to be if God's going to accomplish His purpose in this world? God has great ideas for us, you know, He's chuck-full of them. He always wants to get them implemented and made effective in this world of ours. But when He goes about His work, He can use a variety of ways -- oh, you know that! He works in many different ways -- let's see:

-- there's the earth-quake, of course....
-- and then there's fire....
-- a flooding stream, too....
-- and don't forget the rush of a mighty wind.....

There was a day when even legally such things were dubbed "acts of God." However, if one dares presume to say it, none of these constitutes God's preferred method. What He values most, according to good Biblical tradition, as He is bent on getting His day's work done, is to have in His hands some willing and earnest-minded human being -- say like that village maiden called Mary! That's His preferred method -- to work through a human being.

You read the Bible from cover to cover and a human being is always looming on the horizon -- God with His 'special assignment' business, you see.....

-- He looked for a man, and He said, "Abraham!" -- as He pointed His finger -- "You're my man!"

-- and then at a certain time in history He looked for a person like Moses, and He said, "This time the special assignment is to be a law-giver, and Moses, you're my man!"

Again and ever so often that's the way God works, His preferred method through a human being.

I'm happy to tell you that His plan hasn't changed, as I know the mind of God, I presume to say so -- He still wants to work through people. And did it ever dawn on you, my friend, that that's the justification for your existence? that that's really the reason why you are alive, and alive in this world? -- because God has a certain assignment that He intends for you to fulfill, and if that assignment is to be fulfilled, you're meant to respond as Mary did: "Very well, God, I'll be your hand-maiden. Do with me according to your will."

If you're looking for a new-found happiness in your life, there's your answer! Because Mary is the one who said, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(Transcribed as recorded)

"CERTAIN PEOPLE: JOSEPH, WHO DID THE RIGHT THING"
(Matthew 1:24)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

As told you some weeks ago, the sermons to be preached from the St. Luke pulpit for the most part until next June deal with the central theme: the people, certain people, that is, who in one way or another were involved with Jesus Christ. It is right and proper that during Advent we should think specifically of those who were related to His birth.

And when you think of those who were part of the Christmas circle, invariably you think of two or more people; when you think of less than two, you think of those who were outside the Christmas circle -- and that's something to ponder . . .

--"the shepherds said, one to another . . . "

-- there were wise men . . .

-- Mary and Joseph . . .

...two or more are found inside the Christmas circle; the ones outside the Christmas circle -- the solitary figure: the wicked King Herod . . . the innkeeper.

The basic theme of Christmas is God sharing His love -- God coming from Heaven to be with us on earth. Now ponder the significance of that! The meaning of Christmas: two and more people. Man can't have Christmas by himself and by himself alone.

Last week we talked about the Blessed Mother, Mary. Naturally we talk today about Joseph. And the text, the 24th verse of the first chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

"When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as
the angel of the Lord commanded him. . . "

...and that's the story of the life of Joseph. What do you know about him? Scripture reference is really quite scant. But this we do know about him, let me quickly remind you -- he appears on the scene as having been told by divine revelation that he was not to divorce Mary. He was told by divine revelation to claim Mary, that he was to be part of God's plan....

....he was told, after the birth of Jesus, to take the Holy Child and Mary the mother and to go into Egypt. He was told by God after two years in

Egypt, presumably, to come back to Nazareth....

...following divine dictate, they went to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast -- Jesus was twelve years of age --

What else can I tell you about Joseph? He was a carpenter, that's about all. But every time he looms upon the horizon the magnificent truth is evident: he was following divine orders. He was a man who always did the right thing. And that's no small thing to say about someone.

You may remember, when the biographer deals with Sir Thomas Moore, he has Moore saying to his precious daughter Meg, "Meg, there comes a time when a man has to do the right thing . . . "...and then he implies that if he doesn't, his character is like water held in his hands, and then as he opens his hands, his fingers, the water filters through and nothing remains. For, suggests the biographer of Sir Thomas Moore, there comes the time when a man, if there's any integrity at all within him, he is constrained to do the right thing.

Let me tell you what that can mean for us now. Perhaps you've never looked at it this way -- Joseph, from the human perspective, had figured out in his mind that when he heard that Mary was pregnant, the woman with whom he had never slept, the woman with whom he had never shared the marriage bed -- surprised by the fact that she should be with child -- his immediate reaction was: to divorce her; or, as some explanations have it: to get rid of her, to put her aside. He could have done it. He didn't have to continue a relationship with her. But Joseph, by divine revelation, is given to understand that he is to stick with Mary.

-- he could have argued this way when the divine revelation came:

"But, God, you don't understand! I'll be subject to ridicule!

...and God, you don't understand! ---- I don't understand this!

From a human perspective it just doesn't make sense that this can be! . . . "

From a human perspective, Joseph very easily could have walked away and allowed Mary to fend for herself. But God be praised -- begin at this point if you can't begin at any other point: Joseph is given to understand that Mary is a person. And even though now for the moment she may be a person with a problem, he wasn't to allow the problem to get into the way of the meaning of the person. And so by divine revelation Joseph decides to do the right thing, to stand by Mary....to go with her to Bethlehem, to be there when the child was born. Whatever else you may say about Joseph, you see him now as the man who does the right thing!

And then when the divine revelation came: "Joseph, now you take Mary and the child and you go to Egypt" -- from the human perspective Joseph could have said,

"God, I have another idea in mind, if you're willing to allow me to do it, God. Egypt is too far away, it's a strange land and a culture with which I'm not familiar. It would be a lot easier, God, if you'd let me work this out by myself, and I think I can come up with an answer that I can live with . . . " He may have reasoned that way, honestly, because some of you, and I, some of us reason that way when God makes known to us what His plan is and we come up with all of our objections. But Joseph did the right thing -- he followed the divine dictate, and down to Egypt he went with Mary and the child.

God doesn't let him alone, you know, and when God has his eye on a man He never gives up. He's always bringing him into focus and getting him to see the part that he's meant to play in the divine plan. So now the revelation comes to Joseph: "Get out of Egypt and go back to Nazareth". . . and here again, from the human perspective, Joseph must have said, "God, you don't know what you're getting us into! . . . "

(the presumption of man to talk to God like that! But we do!)

. . . "God -- Nazareth is a village. I know how they talked two years ago when the word got around about Mary. I don't think they have it out of their system yet, God. Do you want us to go back to Nazareth? -- we've been away now for two years. It would be a lot easier if we could go somewhere and get established in a brand new situation. We could make it a lot better, God . . . "

But the divine dictate remains: " -- out of Egypt -- you go back to Nazareth." And Joseph -- get him in focus again -- he does the right thing. In faith he responds to God, and back to Nazareth they go.

Now when they're in Nazareth for a while, the child is twelve years of age, they go up to Jerusalem. On their way home they discover that he's not with them. Bewildered and confused, they re-trace their steps, and where do they find their child? -- in the temple, with the learned ones! I can well imagine Joseph going like this -- (striking his forehead) -- "I can't believe it! -- our child! -- he is spiritually precocious, he is all different -- what do we have on our hands? How can we handle this?" But the divine dictate remains: back to Nazareth they go, and the child grows up within the nurture of that home in Nazareth. And Joseph as the carpenter keeps Jesus by his side, ankle-deep in shavings they walk around on the carpenter-shop floor, working side by side. Joseph, from a human perspective, never quite understanding, but nonetheless, when the revelation is made he responds and does the right thing.

He did it so magnificently that Jesus paid him the supreme compliment. One day

when He was preaching, some people came to Jesus and said, "Tell us more about God, what's He really like? And furthermore, tell us, when we pray, what we should think, what image we should have of God when we pray to him." And you know, that's very important, because we pray according to our understanding of the one to whom we pray. And so Jesus said, "When you pray, say, 'Our Father' " -- what a beautiful tribute to Joseph. That's simply to suggest He had never found anything in the life of Joseph that would be a deterrent when the time came that He could use a figure such as 'Father' when telling people how they could pray.

Well, there you have Joseph. In my book, I classify him simply and superbly as the man who did the right thing. Joseph did the right thing. From the Christian perspective the right thing is always the thing that's acceptable in God's sight. From the Christian perspective the right thing is done in obedience to God. God has His way of making Himself known to us -- honestly He does. Sometimes we're so human we can't quite understand what it is that He wants us to do and how He's getting it across to us....

-- He makes Himself known to us through the Holy Scriptures

-- He makes Himself known to us through prayer

-- He makes Himself known to us through the Church . . . which is nurtured by the Holy Spirit, empowered and enlightened . . .

...and that's why some of us stick close to the Church, because it's easier for us to find what God's will is as we associate with some people like you!

...and that's why some of us give attention to the preaching of the Word, because God's will is revealed to us as His Word is proclaimed....

...and that's why some of us pray as earnestly as we do, that the will of God could be made known to us....

...that's why some of us, the older we become, make time to be quiet, for as we're made silent before God, His voice can be heard.

I was thrilled in company with some of you when I read about I. B. Singer, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Bless his soul, how he brought Yiddish into the limelight. That magnificent story teller, becoming philosopher, takes the world to task when he says, "Never in the history of man (or a thought to this effect) have we so divorced ourselves from God, separated ourselves from religion." And that's why we're so afraid, and that's why we live our lives so ineffectively... that's why so often we do the wrong thing. You who remember your Latin remember the Latin for religion means "to be bound to, to be held by." You remember Joseph, a man whose life was ordered according to the purposes of God.

* * * *

"CERTAIN PEOPLE: HEROD - BETHLEHEM BUTCHER"
(Matthew 2:16)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

Some of us have difficulty in controlling our emotions. Should we go to a movie or witness a play being staged, we laugh out loud; some of us have been known to weep unashamedly, while alone, when reading some deeply moving passage in a book.

Frankly, I wish I did a job far better than the one that I do in handling my own personal emotional reactions. I get mad too easily, and I allow myself to go on the defensive oftener than is good for me or the party or parties who, wittingly or unwittingly, draw out the baser side of my nature. I'd like to think that since September, at least a few months back, that I've improved a bit in this regard. But it's a long-standing problem with me, and I used to excuse it by blaming my Middle-Eastern ancestral stock -- those highly volatile people.

Why do I offer you this confession? Let me tell you: it's because I have a case readily at hand. It has to deal with my emotional reaction to a Biblical character. He's the one we're going to talk about in this sermon today, this sermon which is another in the series of Advent sermons touching upon certain people who were involved in the birth of Jesus Christ. So far we've talked about Mary -- whom I adore....we've talked about Joseph -- whom I hold in very high regard. Today -- it's Herod, the wicked king -- whom as a lad I came to despise.

It's always bothered me since I could never quite control my emotional reaction to this wicked king, the Bethlehem Butcher. As a young Christian I was given to understand that I dared not hate anyone....because of Herod, I became an avowed sinner at a very early age.

I hated him, the Bethlehem Butcher, I tell you. While I must acknowledge that with each passing year, and sadly so, that I am a sinner still -- I am happy to tell you that I no longer hate Herod. I pity him. And I'm also happy to relate to you that while pity is something that passes for emotion, the pity of which I speak in regard to Herod is nothing sentimental; it is deeply a matter of sentiment, and that's something vastly different.

Indulge me, please -- hear me out on this man of whom we speak with contempt,

the child-slayer.....the deceiver.....the king who was running scared . . .

-- the man who was down-right diabolical...

-- the man who murdered his own wife, the two sons that she bore him....

Bear with me, I'll tell you more about this diabolical creature.

But I hasten to say to you immediately, it wasn't always so. There was a time when he was seen as one whose star was rising. His future was so rich in promise that at 30 years of age the Roman Senate declared him the King of Judea. He was skilled in battle, courageous. And they tell us he was quite handsome. He excelled in the art of diplomacy. While presumably a half-Jew, he didn't identify very well with the Jewish people. To all intents and purposes he made them a good king. So good was he that when his people came upon hard and difficult times, he took the silver and gold from his own palace by which to purchase corn for his hungry subjects. While not a so-called religious person, he did have some regard and respect for the religion of the Jews. And he had their temple re-built -- we're told with far greater splendor than ever that which was done by Solomon.

He had so much going for him that some people used to think that he was a second Solomon. You wouldn't know that about him, would you? Well, that's the way it was. That's the kind of a man he once was.

But then something happened. The good man became bad. He became the very tool of the Devil. How do you account for it? There must be an answer, there must be a reason. Well let me tell you some more about that base side of his nature....

-- he reigned for 40 years....at 70 years of age he was an old man running scared . . . at 70 years of age, when he should have been very comfortable with himself, and with people, and with those who loved him and those whom he was meant to love -- he was very, very insecure. Because of some incident, he ordered his wife Mariamne to be killed, he ordered the death of her two sons that she bore him....

-- and when he knew that he was going to die, he came up with a very, very diabolical scheme. Knowing that he was hated now by his subjects, he issued an order that certain distinguished Jews would be imprisoned....and as he breathed his last they were to be slaughtered -- and as they would scream and cry and lament, all Jerusalem would take note -- and then he permitted himself to believe that they would get the impression that people were mourning his death!

How do you account for this good man who went bad?

Well, let's go to the text for today's sermon. It's the 16th verse of the second chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

" . . . then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under . . . "

You begin by saying he was very insecure; you begin by saying that he was frightened by the birth of a baby; you begin by saying that you recognize that this is a threat to him. But what caused this turning point in his career?....what caused him to go mad? And this I say to you with all the strength that I can command -- while I know great joy in my heart that I belong to a community of believers that declares in no uncertain terms that a man can be born again, and by that we mean the possibility of sainthood for the sinner -- we emphasize this strongly: a man can be born again! We emphasize with great joy in our hearts, honestly we do, that a bad man can become good. But I say to you this morning, as I think of Herod -- we must also bring to the attention of the believer that there is always the possibility of a good man becoming bad -- there is always the possibility of a man falling from grace. It's a prayer that I pray sometimes with some of you, which ends like this: "And in the hour of death, O Lord, suffer none of us to fall from Thee." There is always this possibility. And this wicked King Herod, the Bethlehem butcher, is prime example.

There was a time when he was good. But we forget, we remember him as the tool of the devil. Can you explain it? Let me try as best I can -- indulge me now. I think somewhere along the line he allowed himself to throw himself into neutral, as though he had it made. And no man ever has it made! The price of virtue is eternal vigilance.

-- again and again we have to finely hone our conscience

-- again and again we have to question our motivation....

-- again and again we have to examine ourselves as to whether or not we're in tune with the Holy Spirit and responsive to the Holy Spirit

....and while the wicked King Herod wasn't a Christian, there was a time when he was presumably a moral person. But even simply subscribing to the basic principles of morality is never enough! And I think Herod may have been the kind of person who allowed himself to shift into neutral, thinking that he had it made, once he had that position of prestige.

I think Herod was also the kind of a person who became so insecure by allowing anyone to threaten him, and he never spent enough time and energy building up his own initial resources. We're always being threatened. That's the nature of life! There's always something or someone who would rise up to do us in if he could, or fail to appreciate us, or to encourage us or to speak kindly to us. Every wind that blows can make us, if we wish, insecure. And Herod got to the place, I think, where he is concentrating

solely upon himself, and he was thinking of all the people who were trying to do him in. He became so frightened in the face of that insecurity that because of his position he got rid of them, couldn't tolerate them.

This is always diabolical, when you and I think more about ourselves and our hurt feelings, and the failure of other people to appreciate us as we think we are -- we become very self-centered; and we are very slow and tardy in recognizing that our concern ought to be for the greater good that must be served and not whether people feel kindly toward me. I think this is one thing that happened to Herod, too: he thought only of himself.

Now I've a notion that you may or may not accept. I am convinced the longer I live, that aside from what the Holy Spirit does on His own, you and I are drawn toward Heaven by people who surround us warmly and encourage us. And by the same token I honestly believe that if we start slipping toward Hell, it's because there are those who give us a push. Now don't read more nor less into what I am going to say: I'm not so sure any man ever goes to Hell and goes to Hell by himself alone. Somewhere there are these subtleties and these nuances that give us the encouragement. Now I may surprise you when I tell you that to a degree I hold his wife, Mariamne -- only to a degree I hold her responsible for the kind of a person that Herod eventually became. There was a time in her life when, having been wronged, she could have forgiven him....and she never did, according to sources that I've read. Some of us are so fragile that despite the diabolical nature of our behavior, we need to be forgiven. How dare it be otherwise when you remember that --

" . . while we were yet sinners, God was in Christ
reconciling us to him . . . "

unattractive, ugly in our sinning - - in the face of that God came to us in Jesus Christ to forgive us?

I'm reading it this way: as I understand it, Mariamne did not forgive him, and that became a push in the direction of Hell. He never overcame that, and what is more, he never overcame the fact that he ordered her death....and I am willing to believe that he could not then live with himself. He became mad.

It's a frightening thing to say to you, my friend; and an awesome thing - - but we are held responsible for what we do or don't do. Which leads me to say to you, if only somewhere along the line someone would have been bold enough and brave enough to come to Herod and have said, "Herod, don't you see what kind of person you're becoming?" To the day I die my debt to some of you will be very great because you've come to me and in love you have rebuked me, and chastened me - - and I shudder to think

what course I might have taken had you failed to do that sort of thing. I'm not so sure that anyone was brave enough and bold enough to come to Herod and say, "Can't you see what kind of person you're becoming?" And this, too, is something to think about.

Well, there you have it. When you think of Herod, think of him, if you please, as the wicked king. How can you do otherwise? But also remember him as the man who didn't have to be that way. The story could have been different. The final word, of course, is that even though he ends his years as he did, God had the last word. The Babe was born....the Babe grew up, and became the Savior of all mankind.

* * * *

(Transcribed as recorded)

"THE NEWS IS GOOD"
(Luke 2:10)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from
God our Father and from
His Son Jesus Christ, our
Blessed Lord. Amen.

As every Latin student remembers, according to Caesar's Gaelic wars, all Gaul could be divided into three parts. That may be true for Gaul, but it surely isn't true for news. You can't divide news into any more than two categories: Good News; Bad News. Sometimes we try to modify it, of course we do, try to cushion it a bit and say: Not-So-Good-News -- as though there could be a third category. But there isn't. News is either good....or it's bad.

The title for this sermon tonight that marks the Holy Nativity is "THE NEWS IS GOOD" - - - and the text is the 10th verse of the second chapter of the Good News as that man Luke recorded it:

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David
a savior which is Christ the Lord."

Good news. . . Bad news.

First the bad news. Do I hear you correctly? - - you're not articulating it, but I think I hear the ripple as within yourselves you're saying, "O no, Pastor! -- you don't do that to us tonight! -- don't talk to us about bad news now, not to-night!" There was a chap ushering at one of the earlier services....someone was heard to say, thinking of the weather, of course, "What a miserable night!"...and he retorted immediately, as well he should have, "How can anyone call Christmas Eve a miserable night?" Good news . . . Bad news.

You don't want to hear bad news tonight. That's why you've come here. You've turned off the television set, you're not listening to your radio, you've put aside the newspapers, the journals, the magazines -- they're still in the rack, they're behind you. You're looking for this hour within these hallowed walls as a kind of respite, away from all the bad and the evil. There are people who keep returning to this place, honestly they do, for the simple reason that they believe that when they come here, it's the good news that they hear. Incidentally, you know, don't you, that that's the specialty of the Church? The Church does not specialize in bad news. The Church specializes in good news.

I was pleased to discover the charter for this congregation. When this congregation was named, when this congregation was established -- there were those who maintained, "It shall be known as THE SAINT LUKE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH." The key word for the moment now is not so much "SAINT LUKE"--important as that may be -- nor "LUTHERAN" . . . the key word is "EVANGELICAL." For as some of you know, that word evangelical means "glad tidings" - - - "good news." That's what this is all about. And again and ever so often when you come to this place we know a measure of delight in sharing with you our specialty, the Good News -- the Gospel of God.

I don't have to tell you about bad news, do I? Bad news has a way of making its own impression, just like evil has a way of making its own registration. Which leads me to share with you now a chapter that goes back to the days when I was in theological seminary and sat at the feet of a very wonderful person, a man who as much as anything, I think, taught me what a great and good thing it is to be a pastor, for he was every inch a pastor. When he lived in Illinois he was called upon to conduct a funeral service for a woman who lived in a very disreputable section of the great city of Chicago. She had been a woman of the streets, she had died a criminal's death.

...he reflected, when he was given the assignment, "I'm a minister of Jesus Christ -- what shall I say?" He was tempted, honestly he was, for such temptations come to preachers, to make his thrust the wrath of God, to talk about Hell-fire and damnation, to talk about the wages of sin.... And then upon second thought he said to himself, "I don't have to do that!"

" -- they already know what the wages of sin can be!

-- they already know what evil is....they eat it, they sleep it, they're surrounded by it. I don't have to tell them how evil the world is, they've got that message! . . . "

And it occurred to him that the person for whom he was going to conduct the funeral service was Exhibit A! And upon further reflection he said, "I chose, as well I should have chosen, to talk to them, not about the wrath of God, but the love of God." And that's the Good News: God loves us.

That's what Christmas is all about -- God coming to us in person, to tell us that no matter how wayward we have been, how much we have thoroughly our sins, no matter how often we've turned our back against Him - - Christmas is God coming to us to tell us that He loves us. That's the Good News!

There was a chap out in the Minneapolis area some time ago who did what was branded in the minds of some people a very crazy thing: out of his own pocket he rented space on the billboards around Minneapolis, and he had emblazoned on those

billboards this simple statement:

I LOVE YOU.

(Signed) Jesus Christ

....crazy? As crazy as Christmas! For Christmas is God's shouting to us: "I love you!" The good news of Christmas is revealing to us the basic nature and character of God! That three-word definition for God remains -- you'll never come upon a better one: "God is love."

I am absolutely convinced, my friend, that the basic question for any number of people is not: Is there a God? But the big question for any number of people is: What is God like? The Apostle Paul said, "In Jesus Christ all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell."

...one day they came to Jesus and said, "Show us the Father and we'll be satisfied." . . . and Jesus said, "Well, look at me. He who sees me sees what God is like -- a father who loves, who never turns his back upon us."

I read the other day, refreshing my memory, a German theologian's interpretation of the Lord's Prayer. He begins, as well he should begin, with the "Our Father" -- the name for God, because you can't really pray that prayer until you first understand the basic nature and character of God. And as he talks about father, he shared with his readers about some youngsters who waited for their dad to come home in that small village in which they happened to live . . . he worked in the mines.

...and when he came back up from the pits he had a tendency to stay too long at the town tavern. And when he left the tavern he came home staggering, beside himself, not in control of himself. He became a very despicable character. And on occasion he would beat up the kids. So the kids learned to wait until it was time for him to come home, and when he came they ran away from him. That's the kind of father he was.... But Jesus Christ reveals for us the kind of father that God is: a Heavenly Father who loves us, who cares for us, who never turns His back upon us.

"I love you," says God, "with an everlasting love. You may not return my love, you may not behave as I wish that you would behave -- you may not even be my obedient servants. But I love you. You may cause all kind of evil to be let loose in the world -- you may even court the Devil. But I love you. I will always love you, and I'll always be with you, even to the very end." This is the Good News.

If you should be here tonight, and you feel as though life has done you in, as though you've had more of your share of evil than you'd like to have, either because you've brought it upon yourself or others have brought it upon you -- the Good News of Christmas is: God's never given up on you! God's always giving you another chance!

Look at it this way, as it was brought home to us so clearly in the sermon this morning -- God surprised us in coming to us in such a wonderful way in the form of a baby! And every time a baby is born into this world God is saying, "I haven't given up on you yet!" For the birth of every baby is another chance for us -- God re-establishing His faith in human nature. And He never did it as sublimely as when Paul Scherer referred to the Christmas story as 'God coming down the stairs of Heaven with a baby in His arms.' That's the Good News of Christmas:

"I will come to you, I will love you with an everlasting love."

When Winifred and I went to that tiny kingdom of Nepal, north of India, we were fascinated as we visited the Buddhist shrine. And atop that Buddhist shrine was a pair of eyes, representing their deity, and no matter where I went as I walked around the base of that shrine, those eyes followed me. It was never enough for me to know that there was a pair of eyes looking at me from above. That really was small comfort. What I needed to know was what that pair of eyes thinks of me, what that pair of eyes sees when it looks at me. Christmas is placing before us the very lens of God by which we can pierce into the very heart of God and see nothing less than love. The most wonderful thing in the world is to know that you're being loved.

But human love can be disappointing, can't it? Human as we are, we can fail those we're meant to love and we can disappoint those who love us. But God's kind of love remains constant. That's the Good News, the Good News of Christmas.

He was a lad confirmed here in the Christian faith, before the altar in Saint Luke Church a few years back. On a holiday he went with his buddy to Ocean City. They did what perhaps you've done on occasion, or what you have been tempted to do -- they wrote a message and they put it in a bottle and they tossed it out into the sea. It was carried away, for a thousand miles and more. It was picked up three years later in the Azores.....and then the fellow who found it had to wait quite a while until he could get someone to interpret it for him before he could respond.

Maybe that's the way with God and Christmas and His message to us -- two thousand

years, and God's been sending His message, beaming it toward us. He took a risk, of course. It's a stormy sea, this whole business of life. And what if some of us should find that message some day, and there would be nobody around to interpret it for us, to tell us what the message of God really is? Every man who bears the name of Jesus Christ is meant to be an interpreter of the Good News which is Christmas. This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(Transcribed as recorded)

and maybe through me.

Dick Sheppard, bless his soul, was a great preacher in London, but he didn't confine his proclaiming the grace of Jesus Christ within hallowed walls. He went out into the street, and he spent a great deal of time at Marble Arch, as some of you know, Hyde Park, where anyone gets up on a soap box and a bunch of people gather around, and he's always confronted by hecklers. They'll interrupt constantly, and they can be very physical, and they can be very cruel. That's where he found the people who didn't believe in Jesus Christ. That's where he went to say a good word for Jesus Christ. . . . and then he came to this conclusion: that the greatest single handicap of the Church is the poor witness on the part of the believer -- the unsatisfactory evidence that you and I give to people who don't believe in Jesus Christ. I've told you this repeatedly: Nietzsche used to say, "You Christians will have to live and act more like the redeemer if you expect me to believe in him. What can he do for me that he hasn't done for you?" -- so little evidence did he see.

Well, I could walk away from the pulpit at this point and conclude this sermon at this seemingly negative point, but I shan't do it, and I daren't do it. Because magnificently I can give you the other side of the coin. A writer tells about a girl who, when her parents were gone, decided to go out into the country and to work as a farm-girl. And as she worked on the farm she admitted to the people with whom she lived that she wasn't much of a Christian, in fact she had no time for the Christian faith. She held it in contempt. But lo and behold, the farmer and his wife, (we'll call them John and Mary), were devout Christians, and day by day in front of her they lived out their Christian life. And rather reluctantly she found herself warming up to this idea of being a Christian -- just because of them. And when she decided to become a Christian she said, "There's a lot in the Bible that I just don't understand, and when I go to pray, I really sometimes feel that I don't know what it is that I ought to pray for, or how I should pray . . . and there are a lot of things about Christianity that I don't understand. But then I know, if I can become like John and Mary, I'll find my way to God." It's as beautiful....and as wonderful....and as real as all that. Said the Apostle Paul: "You are an open letter for Jesus Christ! You're Exhibit A!"

* * *

(Pastor David's message from the Holy Land)

" . . . as members of St. Luke at the Inn of the Good Samaritan in Jericho, we remembered you in our prayers, we thought about you as you were worshipping in Silver Spring. May God bless you as we look forward to the years to come . . . "

(transcribed as recorded)

"SILENCE"
(Given To The Holy Scriptures)

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Today's sermon is the fourth in the series that deals with the general theme of "Names Given To The Early Christians." As I am about to begin this sermon I am constrained to remind you that it is important that we do this kind of thing, to go back and take a look at what those Christians were like at the very beginning. For they are the ones of whom it was said, as their impact upon the world was being realized - - "They are turning the world up-side-down." Now that's the kind of people they were.

There are people who tell us that in this our day the Christian Church is ineffective, that we're not making much of a dent, and that the thing that we need more than anything else is to discover what they were like, in order that we might know what we are meant to be in our day.

Winifred's brother-in-law has a work-shop in a converted chicken shed. And occasionally when I'm back in the hills of home I stand by his side as he's working in that woodworking shop. Once I observed him when he was cutting out a number of different boards -- they were to be the same length. In trying to help him, I gave him the second or third one that he had cut as he had planned to cut the fourth. And he shook his head "No" . . . and he said, "I'll use the first one that I cut" - - - the first one that he had measured, and properly so, you see. He kept going back to the original, as each new one was being cut, lest there be some error that would be repeated if he were to have used one that would have been faulty and not quite accurate in its measurement.

By that same token, we of the Christian faith need to go back and examine the prototype. Who were they? What were they like? And then we'll better understand what we are meant to be today.

I don't know of a better way to do this, this thing of studying the early church, than to give some time, as we're doing now, to a study of the names by which they were known, because a name is important and basically it identifies and it describes. Names sometimes are the more important because they're given to a person by someone who knows their potentiality, and hopefully as the name is given they'll live up to that name.

Now having said that, let us talk to you about the name that we're going to consider today. And by way of introduction, let me suggest that with a sanctified imagination you see Jesus Christ standing there as the great preacher....

...and somewhere in his discourse He stops, and I suppose a bit of restlessness prevails among the people and they wonder, Has He lost his train of thought? It seems a bit awkward right now...He's hesitating. And during that pause they discover that He's turned away from them and He's looking back to the Sea of Galilee....and now they see what He's been looking at -- there on the wharf are some fishermen, and one in particular is reaching for a handful of salt....and as he takes that salt he scatters it upon his catch....

-- he's a fisherman, he makes his livelihood by catching fish and then selling them to the people who live in the inland villages....and to make sure that they don't become bad, he applies a generous measure of salt -- in order that they might be preserved so that they don't become corrupt....

And then Jesus, the preacher, turns and looks at His congregation. And I'd like to think that pretty close by happened to be Andrew, then there was Simon, then there was James....John.....and His

lit up, as used as to say, "I've just got to say!" - - so much as to say, "It's able to apply now in a very real way the truth of my message - - "

...let me say it for you as I think maybe He could have said it: "You know what? -- You're the salt of the earth! You are meant to be in society exactly what that handful of salt is meant to be to that catch of fish! You're to be as a preservative - - you're to be as an antiseptic - - you're to keep society from going bad and getting rotten!"

"You are the salt of the earth" - - that's the title that Jesus Christ gave his followers.....so much as to say, this is exactly what you're meant to be.

I suppose I could digress at this moment and tell you that there are 14,000 known uses for salt. I suppose I could tell you that salt, despite the fact that you may have to live by a salt-free diet, to all intents and purposes is something that you cannot live without. Somebody has observed that a person could die within 48 hours if his body was completely drained from every bit of salt!

Do you know that animals have a particular hunger for salt? I read the other day about animals that would tear into shreds even a burlap bag in their hunger for salt. An interesting thing has happened -- I think it's a matter of record -- that the U. S. Government was once sued by a farmer because his cow had eaten the paint from a signal, a standard, of an air field that was owned by the Government - - and the cow died as a result of having eaten that paint... and the cow ate that paint because it was trying to satisfy its hunger for salt. The prosecuting attorney, representing the U. S. Government, derided the suit because they said it was the obligation of that farmer to provide his cow with a salt block, and that he satisfied that hunger for salt, that cow would not have eaten the paint from that sign.

Well, it's established in your minds now, isn't it, how essential salt is?

The last time I conveyed a message to you about salt I emphasized the fact that salt is essential in order to give flavor, and that's why you add salt to your food. Well, today I'd like to talk to you about the fact that salt is essential as a preservative. They tell us in factories where food is being processed, there's a conveyor belt, and as one after another goes by that belt there's a machine that has only one purpose: and that's to drop a pallet of salt, the right amount, into that can to guarantee its preservation, to keep it from going bad.

Said Jesus Christ, that's what a Christian's meant to be in this world -- in order to keep healthy there has to be the antiseptic, there needs to be the preservative.....

It's a matter of historical record that Napoleon's troops -- shall I say by the hundreds or shall I say by the thousands? -- in their retreat from Moscow, died on the way, because of what? -- their lack of salt. Denied it, they could not combat fatigue, their wounds would not heal.

....Said Jesus Christ, you are the salt of the earth -- you're meant to be effective, as a preservative, as an antiseptic.

It's a matter of record, too, that once -- was it in the 16th century? -- that the people who lived in Norwich petitioned the British Parliament to have their cathedral demolished, and then they would use the stones for some practical purpose. They said the cathedral is only a needless adornment on the horizon. There are people who say that about Christians -- they're needless, and they contribute nothing to society.....they're ineffective. Not so in the mind of Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ said, "Christians are essential. They are necessary, as long as they are effective.

Jesus Christ also said something about salt losing its saltiness. He said, it is therefore good for nothing, to be dragged under foot.

I think it's in the office of the Morton Salt Company that they have a beauti-

ful mosaic, a mural -- it depicts three people in particular --

-- one man, standing there holding a shov in one hand, and in the other hand he has a handful of salt....

-- another man is standing there depicted as a soldier, with a handful of salt, because do you know that's where you get your word 'salary'? -- from the word salarium, because there was a time when people were paid in salt -- that's where you get the expression: "worth his salt."

-- another figure depicts a woman in the kitchen, with loaves of bread on a baking board....

The Morton Salt people are simply trying to tell us how essential salt is in so many different phases of our life.

I am a realist enough to know that the world is not without corruption. I am a realist enough to know that we Christians do not make the contribution at times that we could make, and even when we do make it, we cannot keep the world from becoming totally corrupt. But just as that grain of salt that's dropped into that can on the conveyor belt makes a difference, just so the individual Christian where he is found can make a difference! -- and can keep the world from . . . as the salt of the earth.

But I'm also aware of the fact that salt sometimes, if it's to do its work, has to penetrate. It can't be done superficially. One of my brothers married a country girl and we were pleased, especially when we learned that they were going to live on a farm. They were going to raise some hogs, among other things. My appetite was whetted -- only to be disappointed when the fall of the year came when my brother told me the hams just didn't turn out. It was their first experience, and he said, "I guess we didn't allow the salt to penetrate deep enough -- the hams went bad on us."

There are some of us who are Christians who keep ourselves somewhat detached.

We don't allow ourselves to penetrate deeply enough into reality in order to become afflicted. It is Jesus Christ, with that great smile on His face,

"The world won't go bad as long as there are people
such as you -- you are the salt of the earth . . ."

For God's sake, don't lose your softness.

* * * *

(Transcribed as recorded)

"WITNESS"
(Acts 22:15)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

As I began the sermon last Sunday morning during the 11:15 hour, I realized in the congregation was Winifred's brother-in-law, who lives near our little place up in the country in the hills-of-home. He has a workshop on his property, a converted chicken shed, and every now and then I would go in there and stand alongside of him when he would be doing some particular job.

I recall how once when I stood alongside of him he was cutting out a series of boards, presumably to be identical in length, for a certain project. Trying to be helpful, as he was trying to cut the next board, I reached for the third one, I think it was, that he had cut. And he shook his head, and said, "No." He wanted me to give him the sample board, the pattern board -- not the third one that he had cut, lest when he had cut that one, the third or fourth one, he'd be perpetuating an error. He was always going back to the so-called original.

It's in that spirit that I suggest to you that you consider this series of sermons that's being preached currently on "The Names Given The Early Christians." There are those who will chide us who are part of the contemporary Christian scene for being less than what we ought to be -- we're not as genuine, we're not as vital, we're not as radiant. In fact, L. P. Jax some time ago wrote a book entitled, "The Lost Radiance of The Christian Religion." So, understandably, I bring a measure of enthusiasm to this series because I believe that we stand to benefit by going back and taking a good look at what the Christians were like in the very beginning. And as we examine their lives, this we can do by understanding the names that they carried -- we may better appreciate what we're meant to be in our day. John A. Hutton, about fifty years ago, wrote a book dealing with this very thing, and the title that he chose for this book was "As At The First." Now we're studying the early Christians by considering the names that they carried.

The name that's at hand today: the name WITNESS -- is all the more significant because it was a name that was given to them by Jesus Christ, their Lord and their Master. Let me read the text for you -- it's the 8th verse of the first chapter of the Book of The Acts of The Apostles:

" . . . and you shall be my witnesses -- in
Jerusalem and in Judea and in Samaria, and
to the ends of the earth . . . "

You remember how it happened, don't you? These are among the last words that Jesus spoke. Now, let's get it clearly in perspective. For three years an exceedingly wonderful thing had happened -- a precious few had had the opportunity to live closely with Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ -- God-come-to-us-in-human-form. This had never happened before. But it did happen. He was the personification of God's love, He was the personification of God's truth....and as they lived with Him they were able to understand first-hand just what life was meant to be for them.

Now the three years are over. In God's plan for Jesus Christ He's returning to Heaven. So Jesus gets them together, the last time now that they'll be together. He realized, of course, and realized it well, that there are some people who have a way of treasuring the last words that they heard a person speak. We do that, don't we? We're told that somebody died yesterday, and if we know the person very well we immediately try to recollect when it was that we last saw the person, and the last thing that we talked about.

Well, in all likelihood Jesus Christ, realizing this to be true, said exactly what He did. To all intents and purposes it's all over now -- "This is the parting of our ways -- I won't be seeing you again here on this earth, as I've known you now for three years. . "

-- but lest they would think that it was all over for everybody -- as though people yet to come would be denied the kind of thing that they knew . . .

...God does exercise a measure of economy, you know -- He tries to make the most of anything that He gives. And what He was giving to them in Jesus Christ wasn't to be theirs and theirs alone. He had you and me in mind! What a precious thought: when He last spoke to His disciples He was thinking of us, among others. And so He said to them: ". . . and you are going to be my witnesses . . . Jerusalem . . . Judea . . . the ends of the earth."

"Witnesses -- you're going to tell them. You're going to testify, you're going to give evidence of what you know to be true . . . "

And that's the way it happened!

You're aware of the fact, aren't you, that Christianity spreads this way, simply by having people give witness? I like the word witness for a number of reasons. Maybe the reasons will become increasingly plain to you as the sermon continues to develop. Now let me tell you that I am numbered among those of you who are somewhat intrigued by

court-room drama. There was a time in my life when I thought maybe I'd like to enter the legal profession. And to this day I'm somewhat excited when I see a court-room scene, or have the chance to sit in when court is being held.

There's an electrifying thing that goes through the people who are present when something like this is said:

"Call the next witness! -- Let the next witness take the stand!"

...then all eyes are upon that witness chair as the person goes to the box -- someone who hasn't been there before. That means then, of course, that the testimony is going to be according to that person.

....I honestly believe that when it's all said and done, when the issue is decided, when it's a matter of life and death, perhaps, freedom or imprisonment -- it may hang undoubtedly, not always on the demeanor of the judge or his capability....not always on the cleverness or the dynamic aspect of the attorneys involved....

But isn't it true eventually that people have to make the decision, have to make the decision according to the testimony that's been introduced -- the evidence that's been revealed -- according to the witnesses who have testified.

That's the way it is with the Christian faith -- its validity is determined for us according to the testimony that we have received. Do I have to impress upon you that you and I know what we know about Jesus Christ to a large extent because other people have testified to us? They have borne witness to us of what they believe about Jesus Christ and know to be true? Someone has said that the Christian faith goes forward one generation at a time....which is simply to suggest, if we became mute concerning Jesus Christ, what would happen to the next generation? Or let me put it for you this way: Suppose my Sunday School teacher had not told me about Jesus Christ? Suppose the pastor under whom I grew up, whenever he went to the sacred desk, had not preached Jesus Christ? Suppose my parents, meant to be God's closest agents to me, had not told me about Jesus Christ? You recognize the importance of it, don't you? The Christian faith is spread, the Christian faith is advanced by its witnesses!

-- "Let the next witness take the stand....
call the next witness, please!"

It's as important as all that.

The next thing that's happened in the court-room occasionally is when the judge may have to direct this word to the witness: "Speak up! We need to hear what you're saying!"

And then of course it's apparent that it's going to be made a matter of record -- there's the stenotypist, you see. "We need to hear what you're saying!" And of course when the witness speaks up his testimony is all the more valid because he's saying, "I saw -- I

January 9, 1978

"NAMES GIVEN THE EARLY CHRISTIANS"
GOOD SOLDIER

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son, Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

I hope the day will never come when I come to the sacred desk without a measure of enthusiasm as I am about to proclaim the good news of God's love. I shall be happy indeed, however, if last Sunday when this sermon series was introduced, you found an added measure of enthusiasm. For quite frankly, I am excited about this series. It's a series of sermons to be preached these Sundays on the general theme of "Names Given To The Early Christians."

Names I think have always fascinated me. In all likelihood, you may remember when I may have met you for the first time. I may have said, kindly, of course, "Now what did you say your name is?" And as you told me your name it could be that I reminded you of what that name means. Names are important. Names can distinguish a person. Names can identify as well as describe. And happy indeed is that child whose name has been chosen wisely by parents.

One of the great moments in the Christian experience is when parents present a child to be baptized, for in that baptism do we not give to that child his Christian name, the name that sets him apart, and upon that child at that moment is deliberately given the mark of Jesus Christ as he receives his Christian name.

The General series, as already indicated, deals with Names Given The Early Christians. There are people who tell us that we do well to go back

heard -- I was there." It isn't a case of hearsay -- it is borne out of the personality, his personal experience.

I'm always uncomfortable when I think of how frequently you and I may be given a chance to speak and we don't speak up. We mumble, we're afraid that our testimony may be cross-examined. We don't always defend it easily. I think I can tell you this in truth, it was the President of either Yale or Harvard, I've forgotten which, who one time said, "The mark of a truly educated man is to be able to speak the name of God without reluctance and without embarrassment." That ought to be the acid test for you and for me -- without any embarrassment and without any reluctance we ought to be able to speak what we know about Jesus Christ.

Now I should tell you this, as you read this verse that Jesus gave, it's within a very wonderful context. He says, "I'm giving you this commission, you're going to be my witnesses." You know very well that He realized He was talking to people such as you and me -- frail, and who falter, and who aren't always reliable. But Jesus Christ says, "The Holy Spirit is going to come to you." This is wonderful! That means God Himself will enable me to speak, the Holy Spirit will empower us, it's the Holy Spirit who enlightens us. If you and I fail and falter in our weakness, it's because we don't allow ourselves to be made available to the Holy Spirit, we don't allow the Holy Spirit to work in and through us. Had you ever thought of that? It's all a part of the context -- the Holy Spirit will enable you to be as effective as you're meant to be.

And then another thing happens in the court-room: "The witness will please step down." What does that mean? You've had your chance! It is over now. That frightens me a bit. I don't mean to be an alarmist, you know I don't, but sometimes I prepare my sermons with the realization that I ought to have, that it could be the last sermon that I'd ever preachand what is more, that when I come to this sacred desk there are some of you who will be here today who may not be here next Sunday. How earnestly, then, have I fulfilled my obligation to bear testimony to Jesus Christ? Have I told the whole story of His love and His truth?

Don't misunderstand me, but according to Raymond Shaheen, do you know how wonderful God is?

--- how unfailing His promises? --- how marvelous His redeeming love? I am cursed, you know, with this throat condition that strikes me every now and then, and you have been long-suffering and I appreciate it. I recall one Sunday when I was preaching that I wasn't able to complete the sermon -- only once in 22 years has that happened...and I walked away and brought the service to a conclusion. Then I found myself standing at the door in the study here, looking out through the window as people were leaving, and I

almost felt myself saying, "Come on back! I didn't finish -- there's more to be told! You didn't hear it all!" It's an awesome thing, I've discovered it as a parent, when our boys were growing up, and I look back and I reflect upon my relationship with them -- did I tell them when I had a chance to tell them, everything that I should have told them about God's love and truth and mercy? I once had a friend who said to me, "Raymond, you can't very well tell a kid at twenty-two what you should have told him at ten." It just isn't the same, the chance isn't there.

Well, there you have it. "Call the witness"

"Will the witness take the stand"

"Let the witness speak up"

"The witness will please step down" . . .

I can't conclude this sermon without telling you two things yet: that while you and I hesitate to think that maybe we can speak about Jesus Christ -- some people are reluctant to think that they can speak about Jesus Christ. They think it's the preacher's job. But Jesus Christ said you are to testify. And every single one of us I think ought to be able to do it. You tell me you can't speak easily, the words don't come? Well I have heard you tell people what mileage you get out of a certain brand of gasoline....I've heard you tell people how pleased you were with a meal you got at a certain place when you dined out. We can speak. But that's up to God as to whether He holds you responsible for what you were able to say or didn't say -- I don't know. But I do know one thing that I believe will be inexcusable as far as God is concerned: and that will be the total impact of your personality. Above all else He'll hold you and me responsible for the way we lived and the impact that we made just by the kind of a person that we happened to have been.

Any number of people will remember these are the two things I want to tell you now; any number of people will remember those words of H. M. Stanley, who found Livingstone in central Africa: "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" But what they don't know is that Stanley said also other words. To all intents and purposes he wasn't a professing Christian, and Stanley is supposed to have said:

"If I would have stayed in the presence of that man
for ten more days -- five more days -- two more
days, I would have found myself wanting to become
a Christian, and he never said a word to me about it."

It was just the irresistible quality of his personality, so genuinely did Jesus Christ come through the man.

Now the final thing I want to tell you. There were those who flocked to Francis of Assisi because of the kind of person he was for Jesus Christ, and they hoped that as they

lived with him and were taught by him, that they could become effective preachers. So he had a kind of little theological seminary. After they had been with him for a while they begged him to be given a chance to preach, to go into the village. And they picture themselves standing on the street corner, going into the church, standing up and telling people about God's love and God's truth. They kept bugging him for a chance to do this.

And then one day Francis said, "All right, today we'll go into the village and we'll preach. And they went. . . .

-- none of them was ever given an assignment to stand on the street corner and preach....

-- none was given the assignment to go into the church and preach.....

And when they got home they were disappointed, and they took him to task and said: "Today you said we could preach!"

Francis simply said, "But don't you know -- as we walked
in the village, as we talked with the people,
as we dealt with the people, we preached!"

Now you think about that.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed
as recorded)

NAMES GIVEN THE EARLY CHRISTIANS: "DISCIPLES"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

The series of sermons dealing with "Names Given The Early Christians" continues. Before we consider the name or the title with which we'll deal today, let me suggest some kind of a perspective, and you'll get that perspective as you try to picture the actual situation.

The reputation concerning Jesus Christ had spread rapidly, and as He went from place to place people came out to pay attention to Him, to take a good look at Him. Nothing but good things had been said about Him. And every now and then He'd loom upon the horizon -- He'd visit this village and He'd visit that village.

-- One day He came to a man who was seated where he was supposed to be, going about his day's business, keeping books. He was a tax collector and he was making an entry here and there, chalking up how much the man had paid, how much he was supposed to pay. As he was busily engaged in that occupation Jesus Christ came into his life. Do you know what it was that Jesus Christ said to him? . . .

-- By the same token, one day when Jesus Christ was getting around, He saw some men doing exactly what fishermen ought to be doing when they weren't out trying to catch fish -- they were busily mending their nets. And Jesus Christ walked up to where they were. A couple of them happened to be brothers. He said something to them that made all the difference in their lives and helped to change the very character of the world. Do you know what it was that He said to them? . . .

Well, you ought to know that He was looking for people who would follow Him -- He was out to recruit disciples. It was His way of enlisting people....because it never occurred to Him that the Kingdom of God would be established just by Himself and by Himself alone. He would look for people to whom He could turn this thing over after His time on earth was finished. And that seemed to have been His primary concern -- to recruit people. Again I ask you the question: Do you realize just what it was that He said to them as He enlisted them?

He didn't come and ask certain questions -- He didn't say, "Have you ever

tried your hand at preaching a sermon?"...

-- He didn't say: "Have you ever experienced chairing a meeting?"...

-- He didn't say: "Can you sing?"...

-- He didn't say: "Can you teach a Sunday School lesson?"...

-- He didn't ask: "By the way, what's your standing in the community? -- are you socially acceptable?"...He didn't ask that.

-- He didn't even ask: "Are you with the In group in this place? -- do you have a degree of status?"...

...and one question He most certainly did not ask was: "How much money do you have in the bank?" In fact, He asked no questions at all! He simply came to them where they were and He said, "Follow me." It was as simple as that.

For that's exactly the first thing that Jesus Christ wants from any person, a willingness, an inclination to trust Him, to believe Him, to stick with Him, to follow Him. And that's exactly the point at which Jesus Christ began with them.

The Bible has it "and he called unto him his disciples" -- now that's the word we're considering today: Disciples. You ought to know that in the Gospel record, in the Book of Acts of The Apostles, that word disciple or disciples appears 269 times. That's significant...because it's the one name that describes more than anything else the way Jesus Christ looked upon them. It's also the more significant because that's the name that Jesus gave them. He said, "You're going to be my disciples, that's what you're going to be."

Now from the Greek or from the Latin the word disciple can be translated as one of two things, and I'm going to suggest that you accept both of them. According to one, it's a learner; according to another, it's a follower. For that's what Jesus Christ asks from us -- not how much we know or don't know, not how much as to where we are, as to where we're going, as to where we ought to be going. He says, "Learn of me -- follow me."

I wish time would permit that I could dwell precisely with just the one term as over against the other term. But because we only have so much time for this entire series, and certainly only so much time for this sermon this morning, let me deal with both of them as quickly as I can:

Learner -- that's what Jesus Christ said to these people -- "I want you to learn from me."

I know a measure of nostalgia when I remember how there was a day when anybody who was going to be someone in a particular profession invariably had his apprenticeship. The

man who became a lawyer first read law in a lawyer's office.....the craftsman invariably would ask someone to come and work by his side to observe and to learn first-hand from the master-craftsman. Now that's precisely the way Jesus Christ said to His disciples, "This is the first thing that I ask you, that you come and be with me, in order that you might learn." And this whole business of Christian discipleship is a learning process to the very end.

I sometimes subscribe to the notion that what you teach a child by the time he's seven he may not forget. But I most certainly do not subscribe to the notion that people don't much learn after forty! I can say that to you on good authority, and I trust you won't misunderstand me. I was forty when I became your Pastor 22 years ago today, and I continue to thank God for all the things I have learned with you in these two decades that have passed so quickly. I thank God again and again for what I have discovered in His grace and in His truth by walking with some of you.....and the learning process continues.

It may well be that when the group of new members is received at 11:15 today, I may say to them as on occasion I've said to others, "It is my earnest desire that in your relationship with Saint Luke Church, your commitment to Jesus Christ will take on richer and deeper meaning, and I will hope that a year from now Jesus Christ will mean much more to you than He does right now." And I think that ought to be true for any one of us and every one of us, that as we continue to walk with Him and to talk with Him, then we continue to learn. Which leads me to ask you this question forthrightly: what have you learned from Jesus Christ lately?

To be a learner is to make discovery — what new thing have you discovered recently as related to God's presence, as related to His power, as related to His pardon, as related to His peace? I bear testimony to this — you've allowed me to do this from time to time, but why shouldn't a preacher speak freely and frankly with a people for whom God has given him a measure of responsibility? Just this past week, deeply troubled and sorely tried, I found myself going to the Chapel of The Grateful Heart, for only one purpose: to receive the quieting influence of the Holy Spirit. If only my composure could be regained, and my perspective as a pastor discovered anew. And there in that 'quiet corner of God's House,' as I refer to it, I understood as I had not understood for many a moon the peace of God which passes all understanding. Have you been discovering this lately? Have you been learning anew what it is to trust Him, to believe in Him, and to accept His will for your life? To the day that we die this whole business of following Jesus is a learning process.

When the Church was very young -- and you ought to know this -- that's how people became Christians. They would gravitate toward a place where Christians were gathering, and they heard somebody stand up and give some testimony regarding Jesus Christ. They didn't have the benefit of all the heritage on which you and I can draw. But when the Church was just beginning, some folks would get near the place where Christians were gathering and they'd hear somebody talking about Jesus Christ. An outsider would come in and say -- what would he say? -- "I'd like to learn more about this Jesus." Well, that's the way it begins, and that's the way it continues, with an earnest desire to learn more. There's an old Gospel hymn they used to sing, and maybe you still sing it -- "More About Jesus I Would Know."

This is one reason why some people have a very healthy and wholesome regard about death and heaven, because they honestly believe that in heaven they will discover joys in the presence of Jesus Christ that they could possibly not have known here on earth. In that day I shall be known as now I am not known, and in that day I shall know those whom I have loved as I have never known them before. And in that day I will discover as I could not possibly have known here on earth the nearer presence of my Savior. And that's one reason why there are some people who have a healthy regard towards dying -- because they look upon heaven itself as a continuation of the learning process...and to learn is to discover. You won't forget this, will you, when you think of the term disciple?

My time is almost up. The term also means to follow. You and I are followers, honestly we are. We're always following in some direction. We're always moving toward some thing or someone. It's man's nature to follow -- for good or for ill. And I think our Blessed Lord understood that and understood it very well...and I think that's one reason why when He began the Kingdom He went to people and He simply said, "Follow me," because He knew that they would be following someone. And He had that much faith in His own integrity to know that it was for their good that He could say to them, "Follow me."

Some years back, during the time of our Summer Staff, when we had our special program, Pastor David arranged for these special shorts that the kids would wear -- imprinted on the back: "FOLLOW ME" . . . and one character saw a Saint Luke kid down in front of Hecht's, I think it was, and as he got near to the kid he said, "Where are you going, girlie?" There are people who will follow us. And as Christians we need to know where we are going, and who our leader is. And Jesus Christ said, "Take me as your leader" . . . "Follow me -- trust me -- believe in me -- come after me!" And that's exactly what they did.

The early Christians were known as followers, and when Jesus Christ chose them He said, "Now I have chosen you that you might be with me." And as they lived with Him and they walked with Him and they talked with Him, something of His indelible character was stamped upon the fabric of their hearts, and they were known as the followers of the "Way." To be a disciple is to be a follower, a follower of Jesus Christ.

Not that I'm ungrateful for what God has given to me, but I also prize what God has given to other people that I know. I sometimes have my moments when I prize exceptionally well the talent that He gave to our younger son Jon. Jon is a painter, he's an artist. And sometimes I would covet for myself the gift that Jon has, that he's developed so well, the capability to take an idea or to take a concept and to put it on canvas, to allow it to become vivid. For I have my moments when I think I'd like to paint my concept of Heaven. For this is what it would be, for the moment at least: throngs of people moving toward the Great Gate (there always has to be an entrance to a place, you know that)... and so I'd visualize in that way the gate by which people enter into Heaven -- moving in throngs, but going in one by one.....

- - and then I'd have a caption under the painting, and Jesus Christ would be standing there and He'd be asking the question:

"How did you get here?"

...and the other part of the caption would be the answer that each one would give as he crosses the threshold into Heaven:

"I got here by following You."

I have known a number of people in my time who made the decision to follow Jesus Christ and never quite measured up, they never stuck with it. They got off the path every now and then and they took their eyes away from Him. And they lived to regret it.

On the other hand, I have never known a single person who ever made the decision to follow Jesus Christ whose joy has not increased! - - and for whom I can say with authority by following Him they ended up in the right place. And that's a happy thought!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed
as recorded)

NAMES GIVEN THE EARLY CHRISTIANS: "SAINTS"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

If as a Christian you're having an identity crisis, then let me tell you, this sermon is for you. Have you had any problem lately? -- which are you: ape -- or angel? saint -- or sinner? beast -- or beauty? Which are you? In all honesty you could say, perhaps, you don't know -- sometimes you're a saint, like now. Sometimes you're a sinner, like last night. Which are you?

Today's sermon is another in the series dealing with the Names Given The Early Christians . . . and the name that we consider today is the name SAINT -- for that's exactly what you're meant to be. Whatever your identity crisis, relax, my friend, you've come to the right place. We can tell you who you are. We can tell you what you're meant to be by the grace of God. For that's the way it was with a man by the name of Paul, who was perhaps the first pastor of the early Church. And as he went around from place to place establishing congregations, he kept in touch with them, and he would write them letters -- like the letter that he wrote to the Romans, the letter that he wrote to the Corinthians, the Philipppians, the Galatians. Every now and then when he'd write he'd say, "To the saints who are in such-and-such a place -- " That's what he said Christians were meant to be. He identified them. No identity crisis now, my friend, this is what you are: a saint.

And let me put your mind at ease at once as to what a saint is. He's not a person fully fashioned, dropped down from heaven with wings. A saint is not a perfect person. The mark of a saint is never perfection. The mark of a saint is commitment, consecration, the intense desire to be better than you are . . . the feeling of disgust that on occasion you can be as bad as you've been. So the Apostle Paul says to Christians, "You're saints! That's what you are . . . " But we've had some trouble with it, of course we've had, because we get confused. We talk about St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. John, St. Luke . . .

-- and in the Roman Catholic Church (for whom I have high regard, don't misunderstand me) comes along every now and then and singles one person and says only this person in this generation will be called a saint, as they deal with the whole canonization process....

And there was a time even in the history of the Church when they made distinctions that unless you became a priest or a monk or a nun you were not really pleasing God. All

others were on a lesser strata -- well, that isn't so! We're going back now to the early Church. We're going back trying to understand what it was like trying to be a Christian then. These people who turned the world upside-down -- who were they? -- that we might better be what we're meant to be in our day.

Well, they were saints. And remember and remember it well, not because they were perfect, but because they were committed, and consecrated. They had halos that were given to them but every now and then that halo would fall to the dust. They'd test it, they'd tear it, and like as not when it went back on their heads they'd never get it straight, so stained were they by original sin. But nonetheless the sign of God's favor rested upon them.

I smile to myself when I think of this man Paul who talks to us now about Christians being saints. He had a problem, honestly he did. You can read it for yourself. Sometimes he referred to himself as the chief of sinners....

...and the same fellow who said, "I am the chief of sinners" would also say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."
...this same fellow who said, "I am the chief of sinners" is also the one who said, "I live -- yet not I, but Jesus Christ dwells in me."

Well, how about it, Paul, which is it? Ape -- or angel? Beast -- or beauty? Saint -- or sinner? And the only answer that can come is this: both.

And the same Paul who would write these letters to the Christians and call them saints wouldn't be writing them very long until he'd start in berating them, in the best sense of the word, taking them to task for their sins -- calling them the sinners that they were, and identifying their sins, in one congregation after another, in one person after another. He who called them saints also called them sinners. And by the way, that's a gratifying thing as far as we Lutherans are concerned -- it's good basic Lutheran theology that that's exactly what we are -- sinners and saints at the same time. And you and I need to remember it.

You won't like me for telling you this, but even though we're being redeemed, we're sinners to the very day that we die. The Devil is always pursuing us, in a certain sense, as far as our behavior pattern is concerned. We'll never have it completely made. As far as our relationship with Christ is concerned -- that's something different -- we're always being justified, and God, according to our hearts' desire, is always trying to get us squared off, to make us right. And that's a happy thought, too.

And this is something that we need to remember when we deal with one another. For shame upon us, we Christians have a way of expecting perfection from one another. We really do. And we become very judgmental, and we become impatient with one another when we don't quite measure up as we think we ought to measure up, that is, the other person.

and wonder what the early Church was like. This group of people, of whom it was said, "They turned the world upside down" -- these are people who tell us that contemporary Christianity has lost its radiance, we're no longer vital. We do well to go back and take a good look at them.....who they werewhat they were like!.....what made them tick? To do that we'll be taking a good look at the names by which they were known. Because as we look at them we'll find out who they were and then better appreciate what we're meant to be.

Today is the second in the series. And would you believe us if I tell you the name that we're going to consider now is one with which you haven't dealt very often -- Good Soldier. And the text: from a letter that was written by an old man to a younger friend. It's the second chapter of the Second Letter that was written to Timothy, a part of the 3rd and 4th verses, which goes like this:

"Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ . . . whose aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him . . ."

Tell me frankly now, what are the marks of maturity? When can you tell that a person is growing up, becoming mature? You may have a variety of yardsticks that you'll use. For our purpose this morning I'm going to suggest that a person really shows signs of maturity when he's able to say, as he looks back and recalls certain relationships and certain people, "You know what -- he gave me the best advice that I ever received!" I think this is a sign of maturity, when a person can recognize that somebody has given him wise and good counsel.

Isn't that one reason now that maybe God allows some people to become as old as they have become -- they've traveled a bit farther down the road than the rest of us.....they've seen some things that we haven't seen....they've had experiences that we've never known. And then from their vantage-point they call back to us and give us good sound advice. It's the prerogative of older people, I presume, to give advice. And blessed is that person who is in a

We can be quite charitable with ourselves, but quite impatient with the other person. And that's why I have a very healthy regard for the Christian Church -- not because it's a company of saints -- but because it's a fellowship of sinners. We're not a club for saints...we're a hospital for sinners, that's what we are. And that's why we always begin, according to our Lutheran liturgy, the same way -- no sooner are we in church than we tell God what a miserable bunch of people we are -- "We poor sinners confess unto Thee that we are by nature sinful and unclean . ." "...but that isn't the whole story. We're a bunch of sinners who know that we are sinners but we're not satisfied at remaining as a bunch of sinners. Some of us, honestly now, would like to be better than we are, and that's why You have to be patient with us. The intent is there, and the desire remains. And that's where you separate us: those who are content to be sinners, and those who are disgusted with the fact that they are sinners, and desire to be better. . . "

...and that's where the category of a saint comes in: the sinner who wants to be better -- the desire to improve.

I once sat with a group of clergymen in Virginia and in the informal conversation that I had with them I spoke to a Methodist preacher who was there. And I had remembered from my knowledge of the Methodist Book of Discipline that when a Candidate for Ordination appears before the Bishop, the Bishop is in duty bound to put to him this question:

"Are you striving after perfection?"

And this preacher told me that his Bishop said to him,

"I apologize for asking such a question, but nonetheless it's in the book and I am in duty bound to ask it of you. And if you don't think it's a relevant question, then let me ask you this one:

'If you're not striving after perfection, then what is it that you're striving after?' . . . "

And that's the crucial thing for you and me. If we don't want to be better, then what is it that we want?

And some of us keep coming back to this place because we believe that here our sights are set a bit higher and here we get the encouragement to get up after we've fallen and to hear the promise of Jesus Christ, "I still love you -- I still claim you."

In a very reckless manner let me interpret for you the role of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior: God-come-to-us-in-human-form to always look for the better side in each one of us.

. . . that's what He was doing when He was here on earth -- always trying to motivate, always trying to establish clearly in our minds that we were meant to be the children of God, the children of the Heavenly Father. And that's a happy thought!

Now I know, fortunately, that there are some among you who seem to shine with a radiance that the rest of us can't quite match. You do have a luster and a glory, for which we thank God. You serve a very wonderful purpose, because you do have these so-called beatific qualities, you encourage us to believe that it's possible -- not to become overly discouraged with our lot, but to believe that as God has been working through you, then God might find some promise of improvement in us as well. And that's why every now and then we do use the word in a very special sense of certain people when we say they're saintly. And you have no idea how often I thank God for those of you with whom I'm privileged to work, to live, and to love, and to labor -- who stand out above the rest of us, because you're God's Exhibit A that it's possible. And yet at the same time we realize that you have feet of clay. A saint is not one who has been free from temptation. A saint is one who by the grace of God has been able to handle it, and kept himself from being constantly defeated.

You ought to read all about Damien, who for Christ's sake sacrificed himself among the lepers, who had so many godly qualities despite his frail human nature. It's told of him that one night, after a long and arduous day's work, he was unable to get home, and so there were people who put him up in their house. And he went to sleep.

. . . and that night his sleep was disturbed, and he became awakened by the warm and delicate feminine touch of a tender hand -- this man called by God. He gathered whatever strength he could, by the grace of God, got up and walked to the door, and started to leave . . . and turned and looked, and in the doorway -- naked she stood in front of him. Inflamed by passion, he walked all the way home until he arrived, dog-weary. But the battle had been won . . .

That's how you make saints -- by the grace of God.

And yet on the other hand I must also tell you very quickly, that any real reading of the Christian experience comes out at the bottom line in this manner:

Every saint has a past....and for every sinner there's a future

And that's a happy thought.

* * *

(Transcribed as recorded)

people who are in the same position as you are in. . . . I am not a
person who is in the same position as you are in.

But the thing which I feel upon the Christian can read in the hearts
of many men. . . . I feel that they are quite honest in the way
the world is quite understood why they do what they do. . . . and I feel that
we have held so much to you that you have been in the position of the
world then when the world was quite right. . . . I feel that you can be as faithful
as you can to the Church. . . . why you can be as faithful as you are is the
name of Jesus Christ? . . . why you can be as comfortable as you are in the
name of Jesus Christ? why you can be as faithful as you are in the
name of Jesus Christ?

On Wednesday morning, or was it Thursday of this week, when we had those
breakfast sessions -- Wednesday morning, for people who come at 7:00 o'clock,
on Thursday morning for High School folk at 8:26. . . . It was on Thursday morn-
ing that a father came to give one of his daughters something that she had for-
gotten that she would need to take with her to school that day. The door to
my office was open and he came in and he spoke, and I talked him over in his
day's work. And then he volunteered a bit of information -- as to suggest how
difficult it is to be a Christian in today's world, and to associate with those
who just can't quite figure out why you can be as faithful as you are. So I
was of his assistance to him when he came on the scene, on his first day at
work -- he said, "I'm giving you a bit of advice: you first, if you start to
say in this job, you have to master the three art of cheating and lying." He
wasn't really to subscribe to any of those things. And therefore, he's
a bit of a hypocrite.

And so the world is complicated. It's not that you can't do it the way
of those people in the world, but the world is not the way it's always
been from the very beginning. . . . It's not that you can't do it the way of the old

the only thing... well, I should also remind you, how terrible a man, King Herod was in that day, and what he -- they can find the story any number of old folks would gladly give their eyes for even their rights somewhere....

...today. And in that, there was no hypocrisy. And there, he'd die this well, only to elude it and then to have something with the edge of the sword come and take it away! And Jesus, there his soul, would say, "All right -- take it!" ...and he'd turn on. They called him a fool for not standing his ground and for giving up. But he's one of the Fathers of the Faith.

Herod -- go back and read about him. He had it made, however he did. He was in Herod's house...and fairly well established -- highly regarded. And then one day he saw what was happening to a fellow Jew. He couldn't stomach it. He became involved, and as a result because of his association being stricken and being driven to do something for a man that he didn't know, presumably, he fell from the pinnacle of power and had to flee for his life. A fool! Why didn't he look the other way? Why did he have to get involved?

Take Jesus Christ. Whenever I've gone to the Holy Land, strange as it may seem for some people, Nazareth has always had a tug at my heart. It didn't always enjoy a good reputation as a town, I know that. But Nazareth is the boyhood home of Jesus Christ. And when I've gone there I've thought about Jesus in the carpenter's shop, how he had it made -- honest! He could have followed in Joseph's business....He could have kept himself secure and confined in that little village. But then at 30 years of age the challenge to turn his back upon the carpenter's shop....

...you've seen the painting, haven't you. In the center has something of -- presumably -- an image of that Jesus who is Nazareth as far as the carpenter shop is concerned...that's the day he got down the implements of the carpenter trade for the last

then, and then He gave to the seventy and sent the world -- to think He's going to go, now... the way to... and then we see He's setting His hands. Himself there in the seventy, and the sun sets the shadow of the Cross on the floor of the sanctuary door. And, we think -- and if He could see, Father, what He was going to do to the people in Nazareth, they would have said, "How've I tried, Jesus -- why didn't you say where you were? You've got it right here!"

I wouldn't give two cents for a Christian who didn't save his witness with people here, "How've I tried, Jesus -- you promised the Christian faith. The world pays you and we the high magnificent wear of the Christian faith in their eyes, because the world will never understand the meaning of a Christian love, the world will never understand the meaning of fidelity to conviction, and speaking the truth is the work of Jesus Christ."

When Bryan Hedgcock first came to this area, he told me that they lived in a apartment house, and that a carriage thing, he was there only once out to the parking lot -- there was about the only car to leave on a Sunday morning as they came to church. And I can believe this because they were a church a few years, and in the month was that is a time 4% of the people lived in apartment houses, to church on a Sunday morning. And the possibility certainly that Bryan could have held me up to have to be that they were not from church, as other people were attending them, they would have felt a little better. For they were the old man, you see. He was going to be a people who were quite different from the old man.

When Bryan Hedgcock, a member of this congregation, told me that at the end of any given week he has witnessed in the name of Jesus Christ to a certain number of people, and now when he told me that he gave a Gideon Bible to somebody who took it from him and then it was on the ground and some of us -- told that

My dear Mary - Do not let me feel foolish, for not. I wish, in the name of
Jesus Christ

"I was alone at home," I said, "and all immediate neighbors' girls under-
stand the situation. All young men, like you, while they occasionally enjoy
the pleasures of playing cards during evening and not being disturbed, are past
the time when one is so foolish as dancing and courting each other.
as Christ says in John's Gospel. Now I think of that lady, whose name I have
never been told, the first African village in Pennsylvania, who realized that at
her age she had better stay home finally -- three or four kids at that time. She
probably thought of herself, "Well maybe some of my friends and neighbors will
take care of it tonight, but if's going to go to that house, and even though they
may not fully understand my English, I'm going to offer to take those kids to
Sunday School." Some of her friends and neighbors would say, probably, as they
do me "May we let her take them alone?" She probably felt foolish. And if she
did, so did they : she'll thank God for that foolish woman who got us started
in Sunday School, along with my brothers and sisters.

Undoubtedly there are people who think you are foolish when you come and you hear that because of people such as you, \$2,000 every Sunday goes right from this house to meet the needs of people in the name of Jesus Christ that you and I may meet need -- not only near at hand but to the far corners of the earth. They'll brand us fools for doing this sort of thing! Did not the Bible say, "The poor you will always have with you"? They brand us foolish.

The world belongs to those, in the final analysis, to those who are willing to be fools for Christ's sake. I could name character after character, I could name person after person in this church who in the eyes of the world is doing the foolish thing. But in the spirit of the Apostle Paul, says, "Of course I'm foolish! And I'm a fool for Christ's sake." And would you believe me if I were to tell you that I'm not so sure that I'd want to live another day if there weren't such fools like those in the world. In the final analysis, they're the only ones who have the world from going completely mad! This I most certainly believe.

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(ഇന്റർവ്യൂവർ: ഡ. ഫാറൂഖ് ഹാജി)

"Names Given The Early Christians"
"FRIENDS"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Only two more names remain to be considered in this series begun several weeks ago in which we consider the "Names Given The Early Christians." By this time it's to be hoped that you who would have heard these sermons may have allowed yourselves some measure of self-assessment. For that's the dynamic that lies behind the preaching of these sermons. That's the only justification for the preaching of this series, that as you hear each sermon in turn, you may ask yourself the question: Is that the way the world thinks of me? Is that the way I think of myself? Is that the way Jesus Christ thinks of me?

Having said all of this, I would remind you that the charge is being made increasingly against the Christian Church today that we have lost our lustre, that we make very little impact upon the world. Now that's a frightening thing to be said about us. If that should be true, it's high time we go back and study the original pattern. Who were these people of whom it could be said: "They turned the world upside-down"? There was no question about the impact that they made. Wherever they went, people had a way of sensing the presence of God-come-alive-in-their-midst. They were vital -- they were dynamic. They may have been few in number, but one who was in a position to record the impact that they made said they brought a life-changing force....they turned the world upside-down. They made a difference.

In order to understand who they were and what they were like, we're using this very interesting device: we're saying, by what words they called? What

were the names that they carried? And then as we understand those names, then we'll get an insight as to their basic traits and character. Now by this time ask yourself, will you:

-- does anyone think of me as a disciple of Jesus Christ?

-- when anyone thinks of me, does he think of me as the salt of the earth?

-- does anyone, when he thinks of me, think of me as a fool for Christ's sake?

-- does anyone when he thinks of me, think of me as a saint? --
one committed to Jesus Christ -- not perfect, but committed,
who every time he falls knows in what direction he's meant
to face once he stands up anew?

Well, that's what we need to do.

Now only two more names remain to be considered in this series. And of all the names that we'll be considering, I dare say the one that we're considering today is the one that may have the greatest appeal for you. There's a certain something about it that will warm the cockles of your heart. It's the name that Jesus Christ chose specifically for His followers. He said -- and it's recorded in the 15th verse, the 15th chapter of John:

"Ye: are my friends."

Is there a more beautiful word, when you think of human relationships, than the name friend? If you have any integrity at all, I know full well swells up down deep inside you when somebody says, with affection and respect, as they introduce you: "This is my friend."

Let me put it for you this way. When we come to the end, perhaps, of any experience, people have a way -- I'm reluctant to say this, but I think it's a true thing -- people have a way when they come to the end of an experience, of being a little bit more truthful, a little bit more honest, than when

position to be able to do it, and equally blessed, if not more so, is the person who is going to know the benefit of that advice. Unashamedly in your presence I give thanks to God for people, and some of you are numbered among them, who have given me good advice and have given me good counsel, whether I have thought it or not. I rise up now to thank God for your good advice and counsel.

I say this to you because in all reality the text is simply a bit of advice, given by an old man, or an older person, I should say, to a younger friend. The older person is Paul....the younger friend is Timothy. . . and Timothy was an understudy of Paul and Paul in his travels had found him and decided to make an investment in him. He felt he was rich in promise. And then as Paul kept in touch with him, he discovered that Timothy was having a tough time...and so he wrote him a letter and decided to give him some advice. And in that letter he says, "Timothy, expect it to be hard, expect it to be rough, and endure it as a good soldier."

Now as ever against that, you ought to understand what Paul might have said to Timothy. He might have said - -

"Timothy, I have been evaluating your situation, I've taken a second look. I think maybe I made a mistake when I put you in this responsible position. I'm not so sure that I should have done it. You really are quite young and you haven't had much experience. Maybe I've done you a disservice by expecting you to measure up. Timothy, I'm sorry. . . "

....now Paul could have written that way and been very honest, telling the truth, of course. But to the everlasting credit of Paul, he didn't write that way. Had he written that way, Timothy could have suffered from self-pity, he could have said, "My even the man who appointed me to this job tells me that it was a mistake" - - and from that day on Timothy could have wallowed

they are as they are going through the experience. Perhaps they're willing now to call some things by the rightful name. In the same time, honestly now, as the thing is being worked out -- whatever it may be to our relationship with other people -- there may be a bit of role-playing, and maybe some element of sham and hypocrisy. But when the last chapter is being written, like when a person knows that his days are numbered, he has nothing to lose -- and so with whatever strength he may have he may tell people exactly what he thinks of them.

Now, not that our Blessed Lord was given to sham or hypocrisy -- God forbid! -- but I am going to suggest to you that as He ended His earthly pilgrimage He called His disciples together. And there they were, pardon the expression, a motley crew. How different they were from one another: one was the big-mouthed one, always quick to speak up and say something, whether it had value or not, but quick to speak.....one was very shy, always perhaps dragging his feet.....another was always somewhat doubtful -- not cynical, but doubtful, and he was labeled as such to the end of time.another was the kind of person who if somebody said something not to his liking, he'd be willing to call down fire from heaven.....one was the deceiver.....the other was a betrayer, who sold his Lord for thirty pieces of silver (he really did, you know that)..... Well, there they were. He'd been with them now for three years. He had called them one by one, He'd made quite an investment in them. They knew they had differences with one another, of course they did -- they couldn't band together for three years and not get on one another's nerves. They had their times when they were extremely judgmental of one another. Perhaps there were times when they couldn't quite figure out why Jesus Christ ever called him to be a disciple.....

....well now it's about all over. And Jesus says to them: "I want you to know what I think of you -- you are my friends."

And what He said He said to each one of them. He said look each one straight in the eye -- the betrayer, the denier, the shy one, the big-mouthed one. To each of them He said the same thing: you are my friend.

What an exceedingly precious thing for Him to say to them! What a tremendous investment on the part of God to make! What a cherished thing for them to remember, when it was all over. And I'm about to think from time to time that that's what took the greatest toll, when it was all over -- the crucifixion was over....the three days in the grave, when the glorious Resurrection, and the word spread like wild-fire among them: "He's alive! He's come back!" And I'm inclined to think that whatever rejoicing they had was tempered by their sense of shame, because when they had one of those last real conversations with Him, He said, "You are my friends".....and now they had to face the fact that they had chickened out -- they all forsook Him and fled. And now He comes back, the one who said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end" "I will keep my friendship for you!" And even Peter-the-Denier was one of the first to be mentioned when He said: "Now you go and tell my disciples that I'm back!" -- as much as to say, "I'll get squared off with you again in my relationship, and I'm sure that Peter gets the word."

You may not be as generous as I happen to be this morning -- not that I'm in an exceptionally generous mood, but I'd be willing to suggest that if Judas had not taken the back road, had he not done what he did, I think when Jesus appeared and re-appeared, He would have put His arm around Judas and said, "I would still like to be your friend, Judas." That's the kind of person He was! And do you realize, honestly, how wonderful that is?

For shame upon us Christians, we don't always appreciate what we have going for us in our understanding of God. There are many religions in the world, you know that -- we're not the only people who believe in God. But

as Christians we're the only people who know how kindly-disposed God is toward us! -- how kindly-disposed God is toward us!

There are many people who believe in God but when they think of God they're never quite sure what God thinks of them. They're never quite sure what God's attitude is toward them. But as Christians there's no question in our minds -- God loves us -- God is kindly-disposed toward us -- God shows Himself friendly toward us. "In Jesus Christ all the fullness of God is revealed" . . . and when Jesus Christ had run out the days of His years, and it was all over, one of the Gospel writers tried to sum up in one phrase the impact of His life, to characterize Him, to say: This is what He was. Do you know what that Gospel writer chose to say? -- he put it sublimely -- he said: "He was a friend of sinners."

I did it once with a catechetical class.....I didn't have too much success, and I can understand why --- maybe I expected too much from them. I said, here's a piece of paper. You'll find written on that piece of paper these words: "Saint Luke Church is".....now you finish the sentence... ..make a complete sentence -- "Saint Luke Church is"

...well, a variety of answers came in. And then I had to tell them as I appraised their answers, that one of the answers which did not come in which I wished would have come in: "Saint Luke Church is a group of people, each one loved by God . . . each one a friend of Jesus Christ."

Do you realize how wonderful that is? From my vantage-point here this morning let me tell you quite honestly as I survey the congregation, I see the differences among you. Some of you are at different stations in life, economically, politically, socially, to say nothing of the spectrum of age. I'm aware of that. And out of sheer love I also say to you that I'm aware of the fact that some of you are at different levels of spiritual maturity and growth. I know that. Not all of you are as committed as other people who may happen to be here. But I also know that every single one of us has one thing in

common: Jesus Christ claims us as His friends.....and we claim Him as our Friend. I know that to be true.

And as I say to some of the people in the New Member Class each time we meet as the new group is being formed, I'm so wedded to this wonderful liturgy of our Lutheran Church because of the way the Gospel comes through -- even in a salutation such as this, when the presiding minister addresses the congregation -- what does he say to you?...what does he say to you as he addresses you, what is the salutation? - - - "Beloved in the Lord . . . "....which is simply to remind you that every single person who is here is an object of God's love. And God loves you not one bit more nor less than the person in front of you, alongside of you, or behind you. It's the one thing we have in common, the exceedingly precious thing we have in common.

And what is it to call a person a friend? To call a person a friend is to affirm the meaning of that person as a person, and to recognize the potential for growth and development through a specific relationship.

I know what parents mean when they say to their kids, when they're about to leave home to go to college or go somewhere: "For God's sake, make some good friends" -- I know exactly what they mean by that. But I'm not so sure it's a good expression. Honestly now, I'm not so sure that we make friends. Whatever friends I have had in life, for which I remain profoundly grateful, have come to me as a gift! God so loved that He gave Jesus Christ. There's love in His friendship. To make friends smacks a little bit of exploitation, as though you're about to put a person in the position where you can use him. The better expression is not make a friend, but be a friend. And I think that's exactly what Jesus Christ had in mind when He said, "You are my friends --" " . . . now you be friends with one another . . . "

I'm constrained to share it with you. It's not Biblical, you'll have to keep reminding yourself of this now -- it's not Biblical. It's a legend, I think, but has an element of truth that commands a measure of respect.....

St. Peter, presumably the Guardian of the Gate, was making his rounds in Heaven, and every now and then he came across the face of somebody that he had never seen before.....and he stroked that long beard of his and he said, "I can't figure it out -- I don't remember that person coming by me at the gate . . . "

(now remember, this is only a story)

....but every now and then he'd see someone that he hadn't remembered giving the green light to at the gate.

....he appointed himself a one-man investigating crew, and as he makes his rounds of Heaven now, what you might call the 'back wall' of Heaven, he sees a figure leaning over the wall with an outstretched hand, helping this person and that person to crawl over the wall. Somewhat astounded, he goes to the figure and he says, "What goes on here?" -- only to discover that the figure with the outstretched hand is Jesus Christ.

...and he says, "Master, you'll have to explain -- I don't understand!" And according to this story, whimsical as it is, Jesus says, "Well it was like this, Peter. I saw them crawling on their hands and knees toward the gate, and then some of them stopped, and they didn't think they could make it -- they didn't think they were worthy. I saw them, Peter, and I motioned them to come around the back, and I'm letting them in. Peter, they're my friends, too . . . "

And maybe that's the reason why some of us cherish the hope of Heaven. He may, in the time of Judgment, say -- "my friends . . . "

* * * *

(Transcribed as recorded)

March 2, 1976

"Does God Give the Early Christians"
"BELIEVERS"

(Prayer at the Western before the Sermon)

Ordinarily at this time in our service the preacher for the day goes to the sacred desk, which is over there. Today for this moment you find me standing here, but only momentarily. And the reason for it is a very simple one, as I bring to your attention the realization on my part that as I stood here today I look upon you who are here present and realize that with many of you I have had a relationship over the decades. I find myself somewhat in the role of the family physician, who when he goes to his office, can almost tell as the patient sits down in front of him what the particular ailment may be, even before the patient begins to share the symptoms with the doctor.

As I look at you and realize my relationship with you across the years, I know to a certain degree far beyond what you may realize my understanding of your spiritual growth and development. Because this happens to be true, I don't take preaching lightly, for I recognize the awesome trust that for some people what they may hear in a sermon may make a difference in their day, or in their week. And I've known some people whose lives have been changed because of what someone happened to say to them. It is no small thing to go to that sacred desk and to stand and to proclaim the Word of God. It is an awesome responsibility.

Why am I doing this now before I go there? I'm simply asking you to pray, in this prayer period, as you've prayed before, that God may lay hold upon the preacher, that the preacher may be made responsive to God's claim upon his soul, and that you may pray also that God may open your heart and your mind to what you may hear. It really is as important as a 1 shot. Let us pray

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father
and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed
Lord. Amen.

Further you will fault me or not for the admission I am about to make, I'll make it nonetheless: I am numbered among those who when they have a book in their hand for the first time, will turn to the last chapter first, and read the last paragraph before anything else is read. I do that for a simple

reason, that I'd like to know exactly before I begin saying just what it is that the author is driving at. Where will he come out? Why did he require my time and my energy to read what he's deliberated? It's very helpful for me to know this from the very beginning, because then as I go from page to page, I have the benefit of the direction in which I'm meant to move. I get it from his point of view immediately.

Now you may fault me for that. Don't be too judgmental. But I'm quick to tell you that I've found this especially profitable when I read the fourth Gospel, the Gospel according to John, because John ends his Gospel in this manner:

"These things are written that you may believe
that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that
believing you may have life in his name."

Now that's exactly why John wrote what he did. John also tells us, as you may remember as you've read his Gospel, that he said he had enough material that would fill the whole world -- really he did! There was no end to the material that he could have used. But, as is true for many authors, they become selective in their material. And John tells us, as he ends what he's written, that he's been selective. And he's been very, very careful to choose what he did because he wanted every page that he wrote and every incident that he related to make it easier for us to believe in Jesus Christ. There was a kind of economy that he was going to exercise, and he wasn't going to waste any of his time or his energy in dealing with material that might be less than significant. So out of all the material that he could have used, every single incident is written to the end that we might believe.

It's in that manner, it's in that spirit -- you ought to know by this time -- that I return to this desk as God gives me the opportunity to do it. There's only one dynamic, there's only one bit of motivation, that as I share God's Word with you it may be easier for you to believe. And if you're a non-

believer, that perhaps something could be said, according to the testimony of my own soul, that may command respect on your part. You may not know all the truths involved - - if there is enough that can be given to make you want to say, "I will continue to move in that direction - - I start to continue to think about this - - ".....then I am making it easier, by the grace of God, for you to come into a more meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ. I have no right to come to this sacred desk if that is not true. And if you are numbered among those who know yourselves to be believers, then I am in duty bound to nurture you in the faith and to enable you to grow from strength to strength and to reach a higher level of maturity.

I think that's the way it was with Jesus Christ in His relationship with the people who were called to be His disciples. Now you know this is the next-to-the-last in the series of sermons based on the general theme of "Names Given To The Early Christians" - - because I do believe that as Christianity is being faulted today because it has a lost radiance, the only way we'll ever regain what we ought to know is to go back and to take a good solid look at the people who embraced Christianity at the very beginning, the ones to whom I have been referring, according to Scripture, again and again...They were the ones who turned the world upside-down. Who were they?

Well, as I've told you throughout this series, you can get some understanding as to what they were by the names that they were given, either names given to them by Jesus Christ himself, or names that they chose for themselves, or names that the world hurled at them. And significantly enough the name to be considered rank fantasy will be a name that the world gave at them, it's not one that they chose for themselves....it was not a name that Jesus first chose for them.

"These things are written that you may believe,
and in believing you may have life and peace."

That's it. The name "FOLLOWER."

Now I'm going to digress for a moment and ask you to ask yourself the question: What do you suppose was the favorite name that Jesus Christ had for his disciples? Known as He was, perhaps there was a name that He preferred above others for them.....

-- He did look into their eyes and say, "You are my friends . . . "

-- He did look into their eyes and say, "Now you are going to be my witnesses . . . "

-- He did choose them and say, "Now you are to be my disciples . . . "

...but when He branded them, what was the name, perhaps, that stood over to Him or had an edge as over against any other name? Well, you're as much an authority on this as I am, but I'm going to suggest the name that had a special claim for Him was the name "Believer." And I'll tell you why I say that -- because this is the thing that He wanted most to inculcate in them: the willingness to believe Him and to trust Him.

Eventually you and I discover that what matters most for us is not allegiance to an abstraction -- beauty....truth....goodness....love -- these are values by which we live. But did it ever occur to you that you and I subscribe to them because somewhere along the line we've encountered people who are truthful -- we've had a relationship with people who are good -- we've drawn great benefit to our own lives by people who perfectly love. Jesus Christ is God, and there are some of us who believe in God because we believe in Jesus Christ. Said the Apostle Paul, "In him all our fullness of God was pleased to dwell." And so Jesus Christ established a relationship with people, and in order for them to understand what it is that God wanted them to understand, He was always nurturing their faith. His primary objective was to move

...a holiness of every degree and of course

Are you aware of the fact that on occasion He rebuked His disciples? Every now and then you'll come across a page in the Bible where Jesus Christ is taking His disciples to task. Now, as He was, He rebuked them at times again and again and again. We have no record that He rebuked them because they came late to meetings -- and I suppose He liked to be punctual, even though that's not typical of the Middle East. When you get to a certain part of the world such as the Middle East or the Far East, people don't watch the clock nearly as much as we do. I don't suppose He rebuked them for not showing up promptly when they were supposed to be scheduled for a session.

...I am sure He didn't rebuke them for the kind of clothing that they wore....

....there are any number of things that He didn't rebuke them for....

Oh, I do recall that on occasion He rebuked them because they disputed with one another -- He had reason to expect that they'd get along much better than they did. But again and again you'll find in the Bible that He rebuked them because of their unbelief, their lack of faith. There are His words: "O ye of little faith"....those are His words: "Why do you not believe me?" -- for if I speak the truth, why don't you believe me?"

You may remember that in the old parables, the old schedule of lessons that we read in the Calendar of the Church, the one that was read on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday was from the 10th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, as I recall it. And Jesus makes the declaration: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem."....and then He related certain things that were going to happen in Jerusalem -- all hell was going to be let loose. And He said then that in advance. And as best they could, He warned them He understood it, and then He believed what He was telling them, that after all, after all there could be an early grave. Now He was trying to indicate that Jesus, He was

in self-pity which would have crippled him to the very day that he died.

I know of some people who have had a disservice done to them by people, well-meaning, who have pitied them. Paul never allowed Timothy to suffer from a "poor Timothy" syndrome.

On the other hand, he could have given Timothy a passive optimism. He could have said, "Timothy, cheer up! Things are going to get better." The truth of the matter is, they got worse. You and I have no idea of the kind of thing that Timothy had to face as a church administrator and as a good follower of Jesus Christ. They were hard and difficult days. It wasn't easy to be a Christian then. He was dealing now with second-generation Christians, and the going was exceedingly tough. And if Paul would have said, "Timothy, brighten up! Things are going to get better!" -- he would have done Timothy a disservice, giving him this passive optimism -- which in itself can cripple as much as self-pity. One needs to be realistic.

...but to the contrary, on the basis of his experience, Paul says, "Brace up, fellow -- face it! You can't run away from it! Endure it!"

He could say it on good authority, for after all Jesus Christ, when He was recruiting followers, gave them no promise of a bed of ease, but to the contrary He said, "If any man wants to come after me, it's a cross that he takes" . . . and I've never known anybody who said that carrying a cross was an easy thing.

The immortal Captain Scott of Antarctic fame once wrote a letter to his wife regarding their son, a small lad. And what do you suppose was the burden of the letter -- what do you suppose was his concern? -- he charged her in that memorable letter with these words: "Bring him up hard!" Captain Scott could never have done what he did at Antarctica if he had not been able to endure hardship, and so he wanted his son Peter to know from the very beginning that

trying to get them to believe what He was saying, because for three days -- now listen carefully, try to get the picture -- for three days they were without Jesus Christ as they had known Him. From the time of the crucifixion to the empty grave...from Friday until Sunday...they were on the road that they had walked with Him even though some of them trudged along at some distance, to the point that they could see Him ahead. They were denied that gentle pressure of His hand upon theirs. They didn't have that. And I have reason to believe that for some of them it was just as if -- not to have what you once had -- to have the security taken away that came by the strength of a friend such as Jesus Christ....and to have the hope that you once knew when you were with Him blasted.....to have to face death and not have Jesus Christ by your side..... It must have been pure hell, as far as the agony of the soul is concerned. And yet it was against this very thing that Jesus Christ said, "You'll have to believe what I'm telling you -- it's not going to end that way." God always has the last word.

And then you know exactly what happened -- He re-appeared. He called them by name. He put His arm around them, the relationship was re-established. And then they must have said to themselves: "Why, it's exactly as He said it was going to be!"

Pastor David, this morning at the 6:00 o'clock Convention service, had an exceedingly precious briefly, brief as it was, in which he told us about Jesus Christ going up to Jerusalem. And then he said to us: "And every single one of us has his Jerusalem -- life has a way of giving every single one of us a Gethsemane, and unless we're rooted and grounded by what we believe we'll have the desert of the soul. . . ."

There's the extreme joy of men, you know -- God made him that he could believe, and there are times when it's difficult for us to believe, but even then God says, I'll give you the Holy Spirit, which is the Comforter,

who will enlighten your mind and help you."

In the Lexington School for the Deaf, I understand, the deaf are met on her level by the teacher, who stoops to where the child is, and then as hands are clasped, lips and throat vibrate, there is understanding. God stoops to our level and helps us to believe when we cry out as did a disciple of His who said, "Lord, help my unbelief!"

This sermon would not be complete if I did not remind you that I've told you an occasion, but here I can read it for you in its entirety, about some people who got together and were commiserating regarding the losses that they experienced in life. This is the way it goes:

"Upon the white sea sand there sat
A pilgrim band,
Telling the losses that their lives had known:
While the evening waned away from
Breezy cliff and bay,
And the strong tide went out with noisy moan.

There were some who mourned their youth,
With his most tender ruth,
For the brief hopes and memories ever green:
And one upon the west turned an eye that
Would not rest
For the fair hills whereto its joy had been.

Some talked of cherished goal, loss of proud
Honors told;
Some spoke of friends who were their friends
No more;
And one of a green grave far away upon the wave,
While he sat there so lonely on the shore.

But when their tales were done, there spoke
Among them one,
A stranger seeming from all earlier times:
"Sad losses you have met, but mine are sudden - yet,
For the believing heart is gone from me."

Then also, those pilgrims said, for the living
And the dead,
For life's deep shadows and the heavy cross,
For the wrecks of land and sea;
But however it came to you, mine, brother,
Is life's last and worst loss.
For the believing heart is gone from them . . .

Did it ever occur to you how fortunate you are. You can say that you believe. Did you ever realize what a personal thing belief is? I'm profoundly grateful that the Apostles' Creed, when it was written, does not begin by a group of people saying, "We believe . . ." Martin Luther was absolutely right when he once said, "The heart of all true religion may lie in the use of the personal pronoun." I cannot tell you what you believe. Only you can say what you believe.

As I drove up Georgia Avenue last night, on the bulletin board of Good Counsel High School somebody put these words:

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT JESUS CHRIST IS THE SON OF GOD?

and then there was an answer:

I DO, LORD.

And it occurred to me, when it's all said and done, there's only one of two answers can be given. You either believe, or you don't believe. And in the final analysis, the thing that's going to hold some of us in good stead is to be able to say - - while I may not know, I do believe.

* * * *

(This service transcribed as recorded)

"Heres Given To The Early Christians"
1278

GRACE. Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Heavenly Lord. Amen.

Today we come to the concluding address in the series that's based upon
the general theme of "Heres Given To The Early Christians."

Permit me to tell you two things:

One - it's the longest series of sermons that I think I have ever
preached since I have been your Pastor. Never have I devoted so many weeks
to one general theme.

And the second thing - while I hope I always bring a great measure of
enthusiasm to my preaching of the sacred Word, and while I hope I can always
take very earnestly the assignment given to me, I don't think I've ever been
more enthusiastic, I don't think I've ever been more serious about a series
of sermons than has been true for this one.

Now the final word -- "Heres Given The Early Christians" -- the name
"CHRISTIAN."

It may well be that very few people will ever come and look you straight
in the eye and say, "Are you a believer?"

-- It may well be that very few people will ever come

and look you straight in the eye and say, "Are you a

kingdom?" "Are you a fool?" "Are you a sinner?"

.... "Are you the king of the earth?" "Are you a pilgrim?"

Will you never see they say one or the other. But someone some day may come and look
you straight in the eye and say, "Are you a Christian?"

Today's privilege, that we may have to ask. 'Twould be far better if he

.... "Are you a Christian?" But having said all of that, the name

above all names by which you could be known, as a disciple, is the name Christian. This is the character of all the names in the Bible's collection of Jesus Christ.

Now, as has been true for each one of these names, there's a text. And the text for this name today is the 16th verse of the 11th chapter of Colossians of the last of the Epistles:

"And the disciples were called Christian first in Antioch."

And is, of course, a statement of fact.

But you know, of course, that there is no such thing as a hard fact, elsewhere yourself of that notion. For a fact, no matter how you is it so, is always to be recognized according to the forces and factors that have made it a fact. It must always be seen in this context... And even, if as all possible, in its historical setting - -

"Are the disciples were called Christian first in Antioch."

The text, I tell you, is a preacher's dream! It falls easily into three divisions, because it answers very simply three important questions: Who? Where? When?

Who were these people who got this name -- the name Christian? Disciples, the text answers. They were disciples. And what was a disciple? -- remember, we dealt with that. A disciple is a learner, a disciple is a follower. And these are the ones who kept learning. These are the ones who kept following. The name Christian wasn't given to those who fell by the way-side. The name Christian was given to those who went straight with it.

Now you say, brother, when we want three things about a disciple, that a disciple is not a perfect person, for as the mark of a saint is not perfection. A disciple is one who may fall and falter and fumble -- no question. But when you see the word disciple is one who, when he falls, knows that

When he gets up, that's should be a very strong thing. He'd begin all over again. A teacher is one who is not only a teacher but a learner. He never says "I've learned it all." He never says "I've mastered it completely." The learner, the follower, is the one who learns with it. And finally, the one who gets the most Christian, just as you and I keep coming back to this holy place -- not because we have to come, but primarily because we don't have to come. . . . And because we're so close to the center, all the way, but because since last Sunday some of us may have lost our way a bit, some of us may have been sidetracked, and some of us may not even have as close to the center as we would have liked to have been. But we are back again, in order to get our sights on Him and journey to re-group a bit, tighten up the reins and get a little bit closer. Well since we start with it, eventually they get that wonderful name -- Christian.

Who were they? -- the disciples, the devoted ones, the faithful followers. What were they called? This is interesting. You may not think it or at first glance, but it's interesting that they should be called, that they should be named Christian. Why Christian? I sometimes ask myself the question, why weren't they given a name related to the name Jesus? In the Roman Catholic Church there's that very highly respected order known as the Jesuits -- it comes from the name Jesus. How come we're not called Jesuits? And even we're not called Jesus-followers? How come we're not called Jesus-people? It's glad we're not. It's glad that the name given was Christian. And that's all you say.

The name Jesus is very different from the name of the Father, and Jesus Christ is to be in a way not apart from the Father of the Father. Jesus Christ is to be seen as the one who is the Father of the Father. He is Jesus, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and that's the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

people thought of the disciples, that related the disciples not simply to a nation like Jerusalem but they lived and died as a figure of the historical scene, but they related these people to the very Christ of God. And that's something absolutely wonderful -- that when they thought of these people they thought of the Christ of God, who has a claim upon their souls....and brings peace for you and me to ask the significant question: when people think of you and me, the claim is? Every single one of us is being claimed by something or someone, consciously or not. Every single one of us is being possessed by something or someone. It must certainly be! We're not completely our own. There is a force, or a figure, that is dominating our lives. I most certainly believe this.

And when some people looked at these followers of Jesus Christ they related them to Christ -- the Christ of God. They said, "You are Min." And that's what that word Christian really means. the ign as it comes to us out of the Greek means: "to be a part of . . ." -- they were true partisans of Jesus Christ. So they were called what? -- Christians -- -- because they couldn't think of them apart from thinking of Christ.

When people think of you, do they think of you and Jesus Christ at the same time? Martin Luther said so, and said it very well, that every Christian, properly understood, is a little Christ. Every one of us is meant to be an Christ to other people. The noblest thing I ever heard said about a man, the most beautiful tribute, was said of Henry Drummond when George Adam Smith introduced him to an audience of people at Northfield in Massachusetts, at the early day there....he said, "I want to introduce you to one who will remind you of Jesus Christ."

Who?

Who?

He's the one who will remind you of Jesus Christ.

to Scripture.

Now were they first called Christians? Not as they left their little prayer meeting, and people observed them at prayer and said, "they pray like Christians".....not when they walked the path that led to a holy place where the gathered company could feel the influence of the Holy Spirit at a particular time.....no! They were called Christians in the third city of the Roman empire, which permits us to say at this time, it was a pagan city. It wasn't a Jewish community, it wasn't a Christian community. But there, in that kind of an arena, they lived and they loved and they labored! And as these people on the outside looked at them they observed the way a man dealt with his wife and the way a wife dealt with the husband...and the way the parents dealt with the youngsters and the way the children dealt with their parents. They wouldn't look through the window as they were praying, they wouldn't look through the window as they were singing. But they observed the way they dealt in the market-place. They couldn't judge them by the way they handled their prayer-book or their song-book. They observed them the way they handled their pocketbook -- the things that they bought -- the value they placed upon this kind of thing. They observed them in the way they found pleasure -- what were the things that they enjoyed? Now, out there in the arena -- that's where they were dubbed Christians.

Now you know very well that there are many people who will never mark the path here to Saint Luke Church to observe whether or not you are Christian. I think of certain countries under the Communist influence -- to this very day, as far as I know as was in Hungary not so long ago, how there are those who do carry a ledger that they go to church, whether they present their children for baptism or not. Well, it may well be that nobody is going to keep a ledger on you, but they will know whether or not you're Christian by the way you live, and I'll see you.

...I tell to remind you of him. It's not of my favorite stories. When I
saw the bones of the Lord of David buried at Golgotha in a place where
none of us would think of it....

...There was a story of a man who was determined to go out
as a missionary to a distant place. His understanding was that he was to be
the first one ever to take the name of Jesus Christ to those people. He became
extremely excited, so any one would, to find himself labeled and classified as
Number 1 in the name of Jesus Christ to a people who would first hear about
Jesus Christ because of him.....and so he went to those, as the story
goes, and he began to tell them about Jesus Christ -- the kind of a person He
was. And then those people to whom he was speaking, their faces began to light
up, with that look of recognition, and they responded to the missionary and
they said, "We have him -- we know exactly the one of whom you speak! He used
to live here!"

...and the missionary responded by pressing the point: "You're
mistaken -- the one of whom I speak lived more than a thousand years ago, and
way, way miles from this place." "Ah, but we know him -- he used to live
here, this very man of whom you speak -- he lived here among us!"

And this was the story. There had been a missionary before him; this man
who was out there to tell them about Jesus Christ. It so happened he had gone
to those people and the Lord back home never learned that because of a storm
it was he never got to his destination, they thought that this man had been
swamp away by the sea. But a man who had gone out earlier had been a missionary
to those people -- he had told them about Jesus Christ. But that was more, he
had told them about Him in their midst. And that's all they could say to the new
missionary -- "We have Jesus Christ -- He used to live here!"

Now that's what you and I are going to be to other people -- as Jesus

Christ in this day and in the place wherever you may be found. And when that happens, other people may look at you, and when they look at you they'll naturally think of Jesus Christ. And I can't think of anything more wonderful than that!

* * * *

(This service transcribed as recorded)

It was'n't going to be an easy thing.

But that's one of our besetting sins. We want things at our convenience. We are a convenience-oriented generation. They even tell us that there's such a thing as a convenience-type of Christianity - - we will respond to you, Jesus Christ, according to our convenience - - as long as it's a matter of easy terms, you can count on us. But life was never meant to be lived on easy terms. Hear us and hear us well when I remind you what's been said: "It's the north wind that makes the Vikings!" It's also been said: "It's all sunshine that makes the Sahara."

I say this to you because I love you, but Saint Luke Church is being constantly crippled by too many of our people who order the days of their years according to their convenience. After the sermon as it was preached at 8:30, a woman came up to me and said, "Thank you for that sermon. Do you know what I have been doing this year since it began? - - I'm going through my Bible and I am underlining the word obedience." For obedience becomes the good soldier. What would happen in the military, whatever branch you may wish to name, if any chap or woman showed up for duty -- only as it was convenient? Duty and convenience simply are not synonymous. Duty again and again means obligation, endurance, sacrifice. And I can't think of any character that I've come to respect who at some time in his life has not known what it is just to endure. Life simply is not tailor-made for any person on the basis of easy terms.

A few years back off the coast of New England a liner was wrecked on a reef. The Coast Guard went to the rescue. One of the captains -- he was an old seaman, but with some young men in the crew. One of the young men, seeing the situation presented to them, turned a white face to the captain -- "Sir,"

he said, "The wind is off shore, and the tide is running out. Of course we can go out, but what good will it do? -- against the wind and tide we cannot come back!"and all the old captain said was, "Launch the boat! We have to go out -- -- we don't have to come back!"

....Take your share of suffering, says Paul, the old man,
to his younger friend -- endure hardship -- as a good soldier
of Jesus Christ.....

And that's what we're meant to be. This I most certainly believe.

u w s e

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"OPEN LETTERS"
(II Cor. 3:2-3)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from
God our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

I beg you with all the strength that I can command as I stand at this sacred desk, not to underestimate the significance of the kind of thing that we're doing these Sunday mornings. For in the series of sermons being preached currently we're taking a good look at the names given the early Christians. A wise student of the contemporary scene maintains that we do well to go back and appreciate all over again the kind of people that they were, so that we might better discover what we're meant to be as Christians in today's world.

Perhaps there's no better way to do this than to study the names by which they were known, how they were characterized. And for today's sermon I am going to ask you to consider them as "OPEN LETTERS." Now that's how St. Paul referred to them. Let me read for you the text, it's the Second Letter that he wrote to Christians in Corinth, the 3rd chapter, verses 2 and 3:

"You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on your hearts to be known and read by all men. And you show that you are a letter from Christ, delivered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on the tablets of the human heart . . ."

...or J. B. Phillips puts it this way for us:

"You are an open letter, about Christ, which we ourselves have written not with pen and ink, but with the Spirit of the living God."

Now as you know, behind every text there's always the historical setting. Let me tell you about it, it's quite interesting. The preacher was this man Paul himself, and he found himself in a very pesky situation. There were people who were badgering him. In fact, there were people who said he was a failure. Some people said "You are on an ego trip" . . . some people said, "You're just preaching because of the money you get out of it" . . . and then some people said, "Who are you, anyway? How do we know that you're to be trusted? Where are your credentials?"

And that was a rather sore point, because in those days when a man went from place to place he inevitably carried with him what was referred to as letters of recommendation indicating his credentials. And if he came into their midst as a total stranger, they would be willing to accept him if he could present some testimonial, some letter of recommendation. These, then, could be his credentials.

But as these people were badgering the preacher, it must have occurred to him, Well, I have no formal documentation - -

-- I can't say, 'Here's my diploma, I'm a graduate of this theological seminary'

-- I can't say 'I belong to this Synod, here's what the Secretary of the Synod has to say about me . . . '

....he stood quite naked in front of them, as far as credentials were concerned. And then I think his face must have lit up like a Christmas tree with 110 little light bulbs as he looked at them, and he said, surprisingly enough, "Why, you're my letter of recommendation! Every single one of you who happened to come to know Jesus Christ because of me! You're my letter of recommendation! You're Exhibit A!"

It wasn't vanity on his part, honestly it wasn't. A teacher is known by his pupils. All other things being equal, a parent is known by his children. All other things being equal, a preacher is known by his flock. So somewhat gratified, the Apostle Paul, this great itinerant preacher, was willing to let the case rest at that point, because right in front of him were people who had come to know Jesus Christ -- they were converts to the Faith. He said, "You're a living letter -- you're my credentials -- you're my letter of recommendation!" . . . or as the old King James translation used to put it: "You are an epistle to be read by all people."

Now this is what I suggest to you a Christian really is -- he's an open letter. And as people read your life and my life, thanks to the Holy Spirit, they get to know God. Now I want to ask you a question point-blank: How have you really gotten to know Jesus Christ? I'm going to answer that question in your behalf, if you don't mind.

-- Many of you didn't get to know Jesus Christ by reading the Bible -- I wish you had. I know they tell us that it's the best-seller, but that doesn't mean that it's the best-read. I was somewhat perturbed when I read this the other day, and I presume you will be too: A lady had gone to see the movie, "The King of Kings" -- and in this movie about Jesus Christ she says to her husband, when she sees Him agonizing in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Do you think they'll really kill him?" -- that's how little she knew about Jesus Christ. She hadn't read the Book and learned about it for herself.

Most people don't first learn about God by reading the Scriptures. They read the Scriptures to sustain them in the Faith -- of course we do.

-- And I don't think that there are many people who learn about Jesus Christ by reading books on theology, even preachers! For theology is so much stock and trade for them. Even after they've finished their

theological courses in the seminary, many of their theological books gather dust as they rest on the shelf. There aren't very many people who get to know about Jesus Christ because they read theological books.....

I'm going to suggest to you an answer to which you probably will attest -- I know it's true in my case. I have gotten to know Jesus Christ because of people. For whenever I think of God, even to this very day, there's a parade of people across the horizon of my mind. Had it not been for them, I would not have been introduced to Jesus Christ. They were as an open letter, and as I read even the fine print in their lives, Jesus Christ became increasingly real.

I don't do this to very many people, but every now and then I write a note to somebody and say, "Because of you it's easier for me to believe in Jesus Christ." -- something about the integrity of their lives that prompts me to bow the head in respect as I think of them, because they made Jesus Christ increasingly real to me.

Now this is what it is to be a Christian. That's what it was in the early days. Every Christian was like an open letter being read by other people. Bishop Steven Neal used to tell how when he went out to India, he worked in the Church of South India. Now first I should tell you that 90% of the people of India live in villages. And when he first went out to India, all the people ever got to learn about something was what they learned when somebody came and spoke to them. Even when I went out there a few years back, they would still gather around the visiting teacher, whether they believed in him or not -- he was somebody who had come to the community who was going to talk.

...well when the evangelist came to a little village, the people of that village who were already Christian came out -- they didn't have a church -- they'd squat right down on the ground in front of him, and they'd form a circle. And right out there in the open air he'd talk to them about Jesus Christ, and as believers they would nod approvingly.....

And then Bishop Neal said he soon discovered that people who didn't believe in Jesus Christ were also attracted, and they came, and they stood on the periphery, and they listened to what the preacher was saying about Jesus Christ. And then Bishop Neal said he also discovered that they weighed his words as over against the actions of these people whom they knew to be Christians. They were going to believe what he was saying would be true, not because of the words that he spoke, but of the way these people lived out his words in action, in the village in which they happened to live.

Now that's an awesome thing. And you and I are always an advertisement for Jesus Christ. You and I are always Exhibit A. There are any number of people who will never know anything at all about Jesus Christ except as they get to know about Him through you,